THE THINGS THAT ARE CÆSAR'S

R. W. KAUFFMAN

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THE THINGS THAT ARE CÆSAR'S

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A NOVEL

By

Reginald Wright Kauffman

Author of Jarvis of Harvard

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TO

JAMES PRESTON

AND

THORNTON SHERBURNE HARDY

2130776

"Brother, brother, we are both in the wrong."

The Beggar's Opera

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THE THINGS THAT ARE CÆSAR'S

I

OUT OF THE SHADOW

When they had reached the little shed that did duty for depot, John Haig turned about and looked back at the walls of the prison where he had spent the last ten years of his life. The road led straight upward to the huge gate, a broad white highway between dun autumn fields. The red sandstone ramparts shone almost pleasantly in the early morning light, and the slate roof of a single little guard-house caught gaily the rays of the late October sun. There was not a human creature in sight about the place; nothing to give hint of the busy black life teeming within. To the unknowing eye the penitentiary might have seemed a newly deserted fortress drowsing, even at this hour,

in the Indian Summer's heat. But John Haig knew and shuddered.

The intoxication of his first draught of the world's free air had not yet had time to mount to his head. He could not yet realize his new liberty, and the prison pallor was still as clearly on his soul as on his face.

"I can't help it, Uncle Stephen," he apologized to the man beside him. "I'm the least sentimental of men, and the place doesn't look unfriendly—from the outside. But I can't help it."

The sweet, weak face of the bishop relaxed its calm, his mild eyes blinked under the shadow of his rosetted imitation shovel-hat, but his oddly ascetic mouth drew tight above his patriarchal beard. He put a kindly hand upon the still broad and straight, if wasted, shoulders of the young-old man beside him.

"You must help it," he said. "You have paid the price, John, and earned forgetfulness. How often must I tell you that your penance was to the full? 'If we confess our

sins, God is faithful and just—' You know the passage."

Haig regarded him with a strange expression on a face which a decade of discipline had left well-nigh expressionless.

"I have thought of nothing else," he said, "for ten years."

"I know, I know," the bishop answered hurriedly. "It was my recalling it, my counselling it, that brought—that brought you here. And you see that I was right."

"Yes, I see that you were right—now."

"Six years ago," continued the bishop, "you said bitterly that the world had forgotten you. I told you to be of good heart; that, if you would be, the day would come when you would thank God for the world's short memory. Well, John, the world has forgotten you and this is the day."

The released convict did not reply, and Bishop Osgood's profession, which had taught him so few things of practical worth, had at least impressed upon him too deeply the value of silence to allow him just then to force the note. Instead, he contented him-

self with regarding, unostentatiously, the white face of his nephew while Haig's dazzled eyes gazed absently up the dancing perspective of the tracks.

White indeed was the face. In fact, it was the strange pallor of the skin that, as if somehow trying to shun, all the more strikingly attracted, attention. For it was the pallor that catches the eye of even the ignorant beholder by the subtle furtiveness of its character. And yet, beyond this, there was nothing furtive about the man. The high forehead, the features all made of firm straight lines, the mouth habitually set and square, the clear gray eyes, even the aggressive bristling hair, if some of them spoke of a man of vain imaginings, all told of faith of that implicit sort which at once translates its visions into actions. In those surroundings, and with the bishop's last words still trembling in the air, it was but too clear that this was a man who firmly believed that he had paid society's own high price for his otherwise forbidden pleasure and was once more quits with the world.

Standing there, however, the generally immobile features underwent a slight change. The delicate nostrils expanded, the broad chest heaved, the gray eyes glistened. The intoxication was mounting at last from the novel cup of liberty.

At that moment the morning stillness was rent by a piercing shriek; with a hideous roar the train dashed upon them and came to a protesting stop just as the young man started violently into the arms of his guide.

"You see," he ruefully explained, "it's all so new to me."

They got aboard, the bishop leading the way to a compartment in one of the parlor-cars. As they settled themselves there, Haig looked about with all the curiosity of a child. Then there dawned upon him the sense of their secure privacy.

His uncle noted this.

"We're quite alone here, you observe," he said. "I thought that, just at first, it would be—pleasantest."

"You arranged for it?"

The bishop nodded.

"Then I owe you this as well. I wish you could understand how much I appreciate your wonderful thoughtfulness in every detail of to-day, sir."—Haig still spoke much as a boy.—"There seems to be nothing you've forgotten. Even you yourself can't guess all the horrors you've saved me from."

The elder man raised a protesting hand.

"I think I guessed some of it," he replied.

"But you couldn't guess it all. It's not," Haig hurried to correct himself, "that I'm afraid to face men. I've served my full term; I've taken my punishment. But you've made the end as easy as you made the beginning hard. You saved me all the vile associations, all the loathsome details, that must make leaving such a place as hard as going into it and much harder than staying there."

"I'm glad you haven't forgotten. I'm glad that you said that about my making it difficult at the start," the bishop took him up. "For it brings us to the point at which I wanted most to arrive. My boy, I'm not going to refer to this thing again, but for just

that reason—in order, that is, to show you why it will not be necessary again to refer to it—I want once and for all to make my position clear to you."

He coughed uneasily and looked at his nephew from under the protecting shovel-hat, which, if he could help it, he never removed. But Haig met him fearlessly, taking it all, rather disconcertingly, as so much a matter of course.

"I understand," he replied.

"Well, then," said the bishop, "this is it, and I sha'n't mince words: When I first learned of your sin I had the natural impulse to wish it all to be kept secret—to have it covered up and hidden. It was, I say, but natural that I should not want the only child of my own wife's dead brother publicly to be pronounced a felon and to go, a common criminal, from dock to jail. I was only a parish priest then, and I told myself that, in my humble position, I could be acting from no selfish motive if I did everything in my power to hush the matter up. However much noise it might have made, it could never

have reached my little corner of the world. I was sitting in my study—I remember the night so well! I couldn't think of going to bed with my wife's dear flesh and blood in such agony so many miles away from me. I resolved to start East in the morning and to do everything in my power—and it turned out that it would have been easy enough—to keep you from the hands of the law."

As he progressed, Bishop Osgood lost a great deal of his hesitancy, and it would soon have been clear to the unprejudiced beholder that he did not altogether disrelish his part.

"With that thought," he pursued, "I stood up to go to my room and pack my valise. And then, just as I put my hand on the door, I remembered the words of our blessed Saviour: 'Render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and to God the things that are God's.' I sat up for the whole night and thought it all out. I have always, I am thankful to say, lived a life of ideals, not of material concessions. I saw at once, and clearly, that the protection I had thought to offer my wife was only a more

subtle form of selfishness. And then I thought of the duty I owed to you. I was a minister of the Gospel and your aunt's husband. You had done a great moral wrong; you must purge yourself morally. You had sinned, too, against society; you must make the reparation society demanded. In my position, it was my evident duty to make this plain to you. I don't think I was a mere meddler. I was sincere, and the result will show that I was right."

Haig was looking straight before him.

"You were right," he assented.

"I came," the bishop went on, "and you know the result. I showed you what I believed to be your duty. Society had said such a crime merited such a penalty. That penalty you must pay. I could not compound a felony. I could not allow you to compound a felony with yourself. The doctrine of penance is as sound as it is old. Well, we have both rendered unto Cæsar the things that are his due, and to God what belongs to God."

The old man's voice trembled a bit as

he concluded—he really meant every word of it—but in Haig's face there was only high resolve.

"Uncle Stephen," he said, "I'm glad of it. I am glad I did it. You don't know how much I admire and thank you."

"I knew it would be so," the bishop answered.

"It was so," Haig assured him, "almost from the start. Anything was good then, so that it was an end. Anything was better than the hideous suspense, the agony of remorse, the fear of facing acquaintances with —with all this against me. I couldn't have faced them. I see now that I couldn't. Some word of it would have been sure to leak out, and I'd have imagined whispers wherever I went, and so I'd have gone only one way—downhill. But you brought me altogether a certainty, a comfort, a chance of expiation and a place to hide my shame. It was a relief—oh, you can't dream what a relief it was when the gates shut behind me!"

Again the bishop touched him gently.

"I don't pretend it was a pleasant place,"

Haig kept it up, already speaking as one who recounts vanished things. "I don't pretend that. But it was away from every one—every one. That alone was so much that I didn't seem to feel those first indignities—the stripping and measuring, the bath, the barber-shop, and the clothes. And at the worst there was always the hard work, and at the last your own counsel and the good chaplain's, until at length I saw that I had performed the act of atonement and would come out, as you and he said, rehabilitated and square."

"You have paid to the uttermost farthing," the bishop repeated. "There was no mercy asked of the court and none was granted."

Haig reflected.

"But have I paid in full? Have I?" He played upon the question with all the fervor of the accustomed zealot. "Should you have come for me to-day, for instance, and arranged," he waved his hand about their stuffy compartment, and concluded, "arranged all this? Should you have spared

me the coarse clothes and the vile shoes they give a man when he leaves a jail?"

The bishop shook his head instinctively.

"I would not use that word," he ventured.

"Jail? Why not? It's all in line with your own doctrine, you know."

"Yes, yes, to be sure. No doubt you're right. Of course you're right there. But in these surroundings— However, that's not the point, is it? Rest assured, my poor boy, upon my word—and you've taken it all along thus far—that you have paid, as I tell you again, to the full. Now, that's all settled," he pursued with a sigh of fatuous relief. "What we must talk of now is your future. You know, John, my own life and your Aunt Katherine's have been much changed since —that is to say, in the last several years. From a poor Western clergyman I have come to be the head of a wealthy diocese in what is now one of the most important of the three or four really great Eastern cities."

Haig's eyes were all expectancy.

"Of course I know that, sir," he said,

"and I am sure," he added, "that there couldn't be a better man for the place, or one who more deserved it."

Bishop Osgood was human enough to be pleased with any form of gratitude.

"Tut, tut," he however replied. "I shall do my best. I always have done it; that is all. Well, as I was saying, for three years now I've had this place. All that time, I may say, we've been laying our plans for you. Of course, I have indicated to you what they were. We have influential friends there, and I can trust you now, John, as I could trust myself, not to abuse your opportunities."

The bishop was fairly launched. He settled back in his seat and proceeded to outline the life that he proposed for his charge. Presented as his nephew, John's way would be comparatively clear. They were living in a city far enough removed from the scene of Haig's crime and punishment. The expiation having been made, there was no need of the fact ever coming forward to dishearten him. To his native cleverness, honesty and hard work need alone be added for the

achievement of all the requisite success, and these qualities the good bishop felt sure his nephew's severe lesson had already secured him.

As he listened, John Haig's whole soul opened to his uncle's words. For ten years he had lived simply by force of such a hope. Morning and evening it had been with him. It alone had kept the prison books from driving him mad; it alone had admitted sleep between the bars of his narrow whitewashed cell. Fanatical it had indeed fashioned him, but it had also moved him to keep himself strong in body and, more powerfully still, it had wrought to make him morally, if narrowly, sound of soul. He opened now to the final realization of it as a rose-tree wakes from its sleep of winter to the first glad sunshine of returning spring. With this day the world was recreated for him, and the joyous glimpses of it that flashed in at his window wove themselves into his uncle's words. This earth that he had been so long shut away from, this earth with its splendid greens and yellows; this sky with its soft clouds and

tender blue, came to him in all the glory of its first birthday. He breathed it in and never noticed that for him its pure air was choked with the dust of the engine's coal. He was too drunken with its free glory. He looked upon the world and saw that it was good.

Nor did his mood change when their talk had wiled away the miles and, with the sunset, they began to enter the city which was to be his home. The town seemed even more to him than the country. Here was the scene of his new life. The dancing snatches of it delighted him. Its bustle was a music. The clang of trolley-cars, the smoke of factories, the bustling groups that blackened the streets, gave him the intense sense of action, of work through all its manifold units of expression controlled by one great purpose. Work, work! that was the magnificent sum of it. His whole soul filled with gratitude to his God, who had granted him this chance of doing among men and for men his little share of the great world's mighty task.

The joyous dream was overpowering. In

a daze he allowed the bishop to hurry him from the car, down the platform, and through a crowd of men—real men and free!—into a cab. In a daze he was dimly aware that they sprang from a babel of tongues and clattered through a babel of traffic down this street and up that, and in a daze he alighted, all too soon, at the door of the big brownstone house which served for the episcopal residence.

The bishop took out his latch-key. Then, observing the excitement in his nephew's face, he gripped the trembling hand. He was even a bit sententious—as the best of clergymen are apt to be.

"'He hath sent me,'" quoted Bishop Osgood, "'to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound!'"

And at that moment the bishop believed what he said. He was the shepherd bearing home the lost lamb to the fold.

The next and he had opened the door.

Then there came about something with the effect of which, for all his fancied foresight, he had failed to reckon.

His wife had rushed down the hall and flung her arms about the neck of a man whom the bishop had seen but a matter of hours ago a convict in prison garb and prison cell.

The light was strong on the clergyman's face. He started and immediately his eyes met those of John. He saw that his nephew read what was so largely written there.

II

THE HEART OF THE WORLD

WHEN John Haig described himself as the least sentimental of men he was as far wrong as, when we come to describe ourselves, most of us are. Whatever he had been in that early life which he left behind him upon entering the prison, he emerged, after his long ordeal, to find the old self gone and the world all new to his bewildered eyes. Throughout his incarceration he had fed on one idea until that idea, daily impressed upon a susceptible nature and a plastic mind otherwise unoccupied, had become a part of him. Unlike the lower criminal, this had been a prisoner with an intellect. His brain was of the active sort that, be the hands employed at labor never so arduous, must have something of its own to work upon. And this was the only thought that was given him. It turned him from rebellion

to loyalty, from despair to certain hope. It grew to be the great fact and purpose of his existence; the one dominant, controlling force of his spiritual and intellectual life.

This idea, it is almost needless to remark, was essentially the creation of a sentiment which a coarse-fibred world would surely mistake for sentimentality. Haig's valuation of his own outlook on life was, indeed, so far from correct that, in any other instance, he himself was prone to accept the common confusion of such terms. But in his own case his solitary life had made him a blind zealot. For a full decade his sympathies had been innocently but ruthlessly directed into abnormal channels, and he therefore returned to existence with a definitely formed plan, a hard-and-fast conception of the moral law. Practical in his application of this scheme of ethics, and intolerant of many another of no greater futility, he had yet met his aunt's embrace secure in the bishop's own faith that the man who has paid society's price for its indulgence will infallibly have that paper delivered to hand.

When, then, his observation, trained as only a prison can train it, caught the flash of awakening in his uncle's face, the whole man trembled in the balance. At once he understood, far better than the clergyman, just what was going on in the bishop's soul. Not that he doubted the justice of what, but a moment before, had been their common premise. He only saw that the bishop doubted it, and for a moment he felt that he must leave him to his shame; that he must quit a house under the roof of which he could not, morally, be seen to stand upright.

Yet the matter-of-fact side of his nature came quickly and anomalously to the rescue of his ideal. After all, his faith in the prophet was, as yet, a part of his faith in the god. They had for years been closely intertwined, and both were far too deeply and severely rooted just then to fall. The bishop, said his common-sense, was only human; his action had been but natural. It was an involuntary action, the result not of reason, but of a sudden juxtaposition of two pictures, the remembered one of which must

inevitably and shortly fade away. Of that one, moreover, the men among whom Haig was about to begin his work would have no knowledge at all, and even to privately admonish the bishop for wavering would serve but to prolong the last moments of a memory or a life better in every way underground.

Being a man who always and at once acted in accord with his reason, Haig passed the incident by and shortly achieved temporary forgetfulness. He bore himself simply as he was: one returned from a long absence to the home of his only living relatives. By the time they sat down to dinner he had so far put the prison behind him that he was able to eat the unaccustomed food in the old accustomed manner, and had so succeeded in brushing aside the disturbing incident of his arrival that he could calmly and even pleasantly discuss his wish to fall to work without delay.

As a result of that wish Haig found himself in the afternoon of the day following in the small and dirty room that served as office

for the city editor of the Globe-Express. He had entered a great narrow building on one of the main streets, and been shot in an elevator to the fifth floor at the risk, as it seemed to him, of his life. He had threaded a bewildering maze of rooms and interminable passages, and at last stopped before this door to a compartment that opened off a larger room filled by a long table where sat many men bending over the morning papers, and apparently waiting for some summons.

Mr. Fealy, the city editor, was a tall, slim man with a brilliant red mustache and piercing blue eyes. He was chewing a great quid of tobacco, and he paused only for an instant from this amusement to look at Haig with a blankly preoccupied air.

"Morning," he said. "What can I do for you?"

Unlike most men who have so suffered, Haig had left his fear in jail.

"I think," he submitted, "that my uncle called on you an hour or two ago. I am John Haig."

"John Haig?"

Evidently the name awakened no echo in the memory.

"Yes, my uncle is Bishop Osgood."

"Oh, yes! To be sure. Your uncle had a letter from Billy Gwynne. Sit down, Mr.—Mr. Haig."

Fealy waved a vague hand about the room, but, his auditor's glance discovering the only other chair filled with newspapers already yellow from age, John remained standing.

"So you want to go into the newspaper business?" continued the city editor, unperturbed by this little difficulty. "What experience have you had?"

"I haven't had any."

"Then what put this into your head? Can you write?"

Haig determined to regard only the latter of Fealy's questions, most of which, he was already beginning to learn, did not presuppose any answer at all.

"I can't write—yet," he admitted.

"Can't write? That's good, anyhow. I've no use for fellows who can write. A re-

porter just wants to report. Do you know the city?"

"I'm a stranger here, but I guess it won't take me long to learn."

Fealy, whose eyes never wavered, spat into a distant cuspidor, flung his large feet upon the desk—knocking down a few unregarded papers in the process—and creaked back in his slatternly desk-chair until Haig expected to see him end on the floor.

"Well, Mr. Haig," he said, "you haven't much to show, have you? The staff's full just now, and the season hasn't opened up the way it ought to. But our paper owes Billy Gwynne a good deal, so I'm willing to try you. I'll put you on at once at a small salary till I see what you can do. That's fair, isn't it?"

"Thank you," replied Haig. "When shall I start in?"

"Right away. This is Friday. We pay Friday. That will give you a full week."

"And what's the salary?"

"I'll start you at ten dollars."

"Ten dollars!"

"My dear sir, we've got men in there who aren't new at the business and are glad to get that much."

"But if a man's brain's worth anything, it's worth more than ten dollars a week."

"A new reporter doesn't use his brain; he uses his legs."

Mr. Fealy evidently considered this epigrammatic, and he smiled, accordingly, his habitual take-it-or-leave-it smile.

Haig took it. For a bit he hesitated, but he argued that he must have something to do, and that this man must know his business. Moreover, he could not reasonably expect his employers to buy pigs in pokes.

"Very well," he said. "I'll take ten dollars as a starter."

"Only as a starter," Mr. Fealy reassured him.—"Mr. McGuire!" he called.

A broad-shouldered, pleasant-faced, sandy-haired man answered this summons.

"Mr. McGuire, this is Mr. Haig, the new member of our staff," said Fealy. "I spoke to you about him a little while ago."

Haig was all wonderment at this evidence

of Fealy's counting upon his accepting the poor terms, but he was speedily recalled from that condition by McGuire's severe wringing of his hand.

"Brown's off to-day," Fealy was meanwhile continuing, "so you'd better send Mr. Haig out on the second day of those teachers. Take good care of him."

"I will," said McGuire.

"Good luck, Mr. Haig. McGuire will tell you anything you want to know. Good-bye."

There was another hand-shaking, and then Haig was led into the larger room, now well-nigh deserted, and directed to one corner of a smaller table by a far window.

"I guess," said McGuire, laying a great hand upon the spot, "I guess this will be your place. Mr. Jay, the society editor, sits there against the wall, and Mr. Ricker has this place on the other side of you. They're not about just now, but I'll introduce you when they come back. Did you read to-day's paper?"

The suddenness of this question, apparently apropos of nothing, took Haig off his

feet. Fortunately he had read the paper—the last, except for his own "stuff" and the "heads" he was to read for some time to come—and managed to say as much.

"Well, here's what we had on this meeting of the public-school teachers to discuss the courses of music they're going to give. We want a follow-story on that. There'll be some speeches and things. Get about half a column on it—we're long on space just now. I guess we have the pictures to carry it."

Most of this was Choctaw to Haig, but he was far too wise to admit it, and so he eventually found his way into the blinking sunlight of the street again, asked a policeman how to get to the place of meeting, and was soon in a car on his way thither.

It was indeed an odd profession, he reflected, this upon which he had been embarked without any palpable instruction. Odder still, he might have added, that he should seek to be at all embarked upon it: The truth is that Haig, like many men who have no taste for any other particular sort of work, had always supposed that the news-

paper was a hole to which almost any peg was suited. He wanted also, and for obvious reasons, to be out of doors as much as some good class of employment would allow him to be, and above all he was anxious to get close to the very throbbing heart of life. Journalism, he had decided, was exactly the place for him.

Unacquainted with the hours of the business, he had gone to the office somewhat late. The meeting he was to " cover " had been set for eleven in the morning, so that when he finally got to the appointed place he was surprised to find it fast closed. By the aid of a directory he managed, however, to find one of the officers who lived near by, and from him got a portion of an address and enough additional facts to fill, he thought, the space required.

When he again entered the local room it was after six o'clock. At his place was a manila envelope containing for his guidance clippings from the evening papers, which offered all the news he had so elaborately gathered, and beside it, even elbowing it, sat

a little fellow, pale, briefly mustached, close-cropped, with a set of false teeth and a broad grin.

"You're the new man, ain't you?" asked this person.

Haig admitted his guilt.

"Well, say—my name's Ricker—was you out on those teachers?"

"Yes."

"Why, I could 'a' given you th' whole thing. I've been doin' th' Board o' Education for two years now. I guess you're new at the business."

"This is my first offence."

"Then look-'e-here: You don't want to bother over a story of this kind. You want to wait for the first edition of the evening papers. Oh, yes—and you want to keep an account of everything you spend for the paper. That goes on your expense-list. You turn it in Thursday nights. It's a rotten business. All work and no thanks. I've been kep' here till two o'clock every mornin' this week."

Haig wanted to write, but Ricker assured

him that there was no hurry—he couldn't leave for dinner before the evening assignments were given out, and that would not be for an hour yet—so that he had to let the man run on:

"How'd you get on the paper? It's like drawin' teeth. Everything's pull these days, I tell you. See Fealy? My my! ain't he lippy? And that toiling copy-reader over there, he's another. He's literary, an' he thinks Marie Corelli's the greatest writer ever lived. But he's just an ordinary 'editor'; doesn't count for much—name's Carson—an' Mac's the salt of the earth, an' so's Ben Donald—he's Fealy's assistant. Guess you got Wayne's place. He was fired to-day. That seat never was lucky. Stubbs had it before Wayne an' he shot himself. Lovely boy, too."

Haig was arranging his clippings and notes.

"By the way," he asked, he never knew why, "who's Billy Ginn?"

Ricker leered.

"You mean Billy Gwynne. Be careful

what you write about him. He's the boss of the whole town."

"Politically?"

"Yep. An' every other way, too. They've never been able to catch him, but if there was only a paper that'd print it, I know stories about that man—enough to get him twenty years." Ricker spoke with a sort of admiration. "But," he concluded, "even the Courier wouldn't touch them. I tell you a man's all right as long as he has friends and isn't caught."

Haig turned to his work. He had long ago forgotten this popular attitude towards crime, and Ricker's crude expression of it shocked him not a little. Nor was that all. He had heard his uncle speak of a letter from this politician, who had then been mentioned as a respected churchman. Now it appeared —though there was large possibility of both confusion and overstatement—that the man's worldly reputation was one for successful fraud. If there was not some mistake of identity, then he was at a loss to account for the bishop's blindness. But of base conces-

sion on the part of his relative he did not dream, and, as Ricker's latest sentiment closed a door between the two reporters, he resolved that he would think no more about the matter. Here was a subject of which he would next day talk to his uncle, but in the mean time he would none of it. Work was, after all, the first thing. And so he started upon his story.

III

ENTER A GIRL

No appeal to work was destined long to keep the new reporter from his cogitations upon the house of Gwynne. He had, with infinite pains, written just twice the required number of words about his musical school-teachers when his name was bawled from the end of the table technically known as the "copy-desk," and, following the example which had just been set by Ricker, he made his way thither.

Fealy had long since completed his day's work, and his assistant, Donald, was in charge of the local room. The latter man was a pleasant, persuasive Scot who came, nevertheless, directly to the point:

"Mr. Haig, I'm glad to meet you. I hope you'll like the work. We're a little short of men at present,"—John remembered that

Fealy had said just the other thing—"but I'm going to be easy on you to-night. We have to make up the Sunday society page to-morrow and we need one more picture. Phyllis Gwynne was one of the *débutantes* last week, and somehow nobody got a photograph of her. We'd like one. If you can get hold of her father or mother I don't think you'll have any trouble. She's a daughter of Billy Gwynne. Here's the address."

This assignment did not precisely meet Haig's preconceived notions of journalism. Indeed, to tell the truth, the profession had thus far given him a rather dismal initiation. His early opinions of it had been like those of most outsiders. He did not, of course, expect at once to be placed upon the editorial staff or sent to interview a presidential possibility, but he decidedly had not counted upon being sent to report a meeting of school-teachers in the afternoon and to secure a girl's picture in the evening. He had all the novice's disdain for these tasks, and all the novice's inability to understand the market value of such "news" as he had been gather-

ing. He failed, in a word, to comprehend that a newspaper is as little of a sermon and as much of a business concern as is a department store. Consequently he was half-consciously depressed and almost as sensibly disheartened by his new mission.

Nevertheless, since it was not as yet given to him to mould public opinion in the larger affairs of life, he was forced to acknowledge that his assignment presented certain compensations. He was already more than mildly concerned about the family the head of which had apparently done so much for him, so that he was rather glad of the chance to learn more of it, and not a little relieved when, after some search, he at last found himself before an eminently inoffensive brownstone house, very like the bishop's, and standing in what he had that day learned was the most fashionable portion of the city.

His pull at the bell was answered by a man-servant, whose appearance was not calculated to interfere with the impression produced by the exterior of the house.

Haig asked for Mr. Gwynne. He was not

at home. And Mrs. Gwynne? She also had gone out. Possibly, then, suggested Haig, he could see Miss Gwynne.

The man showed signs of discretion, and thereupon Haig, though he knew it not, gave his first evidence of the newspaper instinct.

"I came," he triumphantly and almost authoritatively explained, "to see Mr. Gwynne upon a somewhat personal matter, but Miss Gwynne will answer quite as well."

The servant capitulated.

"What name?" he asked after the manner of his kind.

John was not yet enough of the world to have recovered his card-plate.

"Never mind that," he said shortly. "Take my message at once."

The connotation had nettled him, and the resulting tone completed his victory. He was shown into a large and brilliantly lighted room, rich, but furnished in undeniably good taste. The pictures especially were of the first order, and framed for their own sakes, not for the frames'. The walls were in deep colours and the rugs luxurious but calm of

tone. Bishop Osgood, even with his small means, could have done no better. Nay, at the first glance, Haig concluded that nobody could have improved upon the heiress of the house herself as she advanced towards him.

When those who knew her well did not think only of her position and wealth, they rightly considered Phyllis Gwynne a very pretty girl. Slightly under medium height, with a complexion of clear and healthy pallor, a too red mouth, and a nose that in a young woman of less breeding would have been unjustified in its scorn of the Greek conception of all that a nose should be, she had been reared so to carry her defects that any save a cynic saw but her trim, graceful figure, her magnificent chestnut hair, and her large and subtle hazel eyes. Her real charm lay, in fact, in the naïve happiness of the child with the golden spoon. For she was decidedly a type with possibilities, no doubt, for specific characterization, but with such development so neglected—not to say combated—as to be relegated to a mental background whence

only a supreme emotion could evoke it into kinetic energy.

To John Haig's shattered experience the race was, however, a collection of individuals, and upon his fresh horizon, already somewhat troubled by the initial day's little discomfitures, this, his first daughter of fortune, rose with all the soothing beauty of the evening star.

He had got as far as her dress, and had noted only that it was filmy and blue and enchanting, when there burst upon him the sense that she had paused before him between curiosity and surprise.

"Good-evening."

It was not so much the pleasant American soprano of the tone as the frank American spirit informing it that put them both at once somehow at their ease.

He looked up to her face again and, each a child from such divergent causes, they smiled.

"Miss Gwynne?" he asked.

She nodded. It was the inclination of a girl.

"I am here," he continued, "on a rather embarrassing errand. The fact is, I'm from the Express. I was sent to get your picture for the society page, and as I'm new at the work I didn't know any way but to ask for it."

Further apologies thronged easily now to his lips, but were not destined for birth.

"My picture? Oh, isn't that splendid!"

She sat down on a fragile chair and, with a happy laugh, considered the joyous opportunity.

Here for Haig was the end of another Philistine illusion concerning journalism. Pleasant people really did like to have their pictures in a paper! But the present example of such people was far too pleasant, not to say startling, for any analytical consideration of the general problem involved, and in obedience to a gesture John too sat down to deal with the phase of the matter directly in hand.

"Then you don't mind?" he managed to ask.

Her reply was one of those pretty verbal

cascades that, having so long to fall, turn mist half-way down and are not again a coherent stream until they are gathered into the final pool beneath.

"Mind?" she gasped. "I'm only too glad of it—the chance, you know. All the girls who came out have been in but me—Bess Dinwiddie, Blanche Hardy, Ethel Trench, Jen Freeze—oh, all of them!—and I'm green with envy—or yellow, or whatever one gets. Really, I'd almost made up my mind to send my photograph—as I'd like to know if some of them didn't."

Haig drank of the pool, but——

"I'm afraid," he confessed, "that I can't help you there. This is my first day on the paper."

"And they sent you to me? Is that a compliment?"

John was forgetting himself, surprising himself, and delighting in the surprise.

"For you?" he achieved. "To a new reporter it was very flattering."

Miss Gwynne had tact enough to revert to the main theme.

"I don't know what Mr.——" She hesitated, looked him over, and then chose the term of equality, "what my father would say about my giving you a picture——"

"You will tell him, of course?" suggested journalist John.

She met him with her best weapon, her smile.

"Never!" she declared.

And even Haig's Puritan conscience did not enforce objection.

"You mustn't even let on how you got it, I'm afraid," she pursued. "Father, I dare say, wouldn't finally mind, but I fear mother is rather old-fashioned about such things, and if father heard how you got it he might let the cat out of the bag."

"I sha'n't even tell them at the office how I came by it."

There was a pause which she again saved from embarrassment by her manner of direct appeal to bare facts.

"It's an absurd convention," she explained, "and everybody knows everybody else is lying, but they all say to each other

that they can't imagine how the papers get hold of all they print about them."

She had managed, by the imagining of a common secret, to put him completely at his ease; had overcome both his natural and his artificially enforced shyness.

"It's like children playing 'pretend,'" he suggested.

"Exactly," she agreed.

"I am learning my profession."

"Oh, for this part of it you couldn't have come to a better school!"

"And yet the best newspaper men never believe in schools of journalism."

"Well, this one is so practical, you see. And now you'll want the picture."

He looked at her with his odd, contemplative smile.

"Come to think of it," he said, "that was my mission."

"Then if you'll let me—I daren't trust even the servants in the deed—I'll run upstairs and get it."

She rose, but John's eye had been caught by a photograph on a table at her side.

"Must you go for it?" he asked.

She followed his glance.

"Oh, that's an old one!" she cried. "I couldn't let you have that."

She reached for it, but he had been too quick for her.

"If you will allow me," he appealed, and took the picture.

It was, as she had said, an old, or rather a young one—perhaps five years old. It showed a slim girl, a schoolgirl, indeed, with a sweet face, ingenuous, almost wistful, and something—he could not say what—about it that, as he looked up at the original for confirmation, he found missing, or supplanted there. For a flash he felt the loss of it, but then she stooped to examine the picture and he felt her breath for a flying instant on his trembling hand.

"If I may say so," he, however, seriously persisted, "it is very lovely."

"It's a fright," she retorted, and disappeared.

He stood alone then, with the photograph in his hand, and again he began to fall a

victim to its peculiar charm. What was it? What was this subtle quality that spoke straight to all that was best in him from out those pictured girlish eyes? What had that flash of light travelled from the burning sun through sheer space, for all the millions of miles, to catch in that particular instant and fix upon the sensitive plate? Just the face of a child, a face peeping through the half-opened door of womanhood, joyously expectant, and delightfully awed by the dim disclosures that, with innocent wisdom, it guessed were lurking there. He felt the spell none the less keenly for his inability to grasp its processes.

Five years ago! Why, then he was—he was—— The sealed and forgotten springs of his heart, the lost wells of love, gushed into his eyes and mastered him. Foolishly, impulsively, he bent his head as if to kiss the printed lips.

Whether or no she saw him he could not divine, but at that moment her voice, at any rate, sounded from the doorway.

"I don't think it's very nice of you—is it?

—to be so much pleased with what I used to be and not with what——" She stopped abruptly. Daring at last to steal a glance at her, he thought she even blushed a little. But she soon went on easily: "If you've quite done, however, perhaps you'll look at this."

The newer picture had, certainly, its points of merit, even of superiority. In fact, to the more tutored observer, it was just that quality of superiority in the expression of the photograph, as of the present girl herself, that would have been the single detracting influence. But in such things John was not tutored. For him the later phase of his planet was so brilliant as to obliterate, for the time, the very memory of what it had superseded.

"Yes," he granted, "I think I do like this one better."

"It's surely more suited to what your paper wants it for."

"Ah yes, it is my paper that wants it, isn't it?"

She passed this by.

"I can have it back, can't I?" she asked, as if by way of afterthought.

"Why I—I suppose so," he stammered. "You see, I'm so dreadfully new at these things that I don't know what the custom is."

"I really ought to have it," she explained. "I don't think it's very pleasant to think of one's photograph lying about a newspaper office——"

"Oh, it wouldn't do that!" he assured her. If there was any question of this sort, he resolved that he would have the picture for himself.

"But that's not my only reason for wanting it returned. It's the last of the lot, and I forgot to order any more to-day, and I faithfully promised Bishop Osgood to give him one not later than to-morrow. He confirmed me, and he wanted the pictures of all that class. He got most of them at the time of it all, you know—but for one reason or another I've been putting it off from time to time."

"Bishop Osgood?"

"Yes. Do you know him? But of course you do. Everybody does know him."

"I am his nephew. Just at present I am living with him."

She looked her pleasure.

"His nephew? I didn't know he had one. I didn't remember hearing him speak——"

"Probably not. I've been—I've been away from him—quite far away—for a number of years."

"Then you are Mr. Osgood?"

"No. My name is Haig—John Haig. The bishop is only my uncle by marriage, though he's really been much more to me than that. Even though I've seen so little of him for so long, he's been everything to me."

"I can easily understand how he should be. I think he is the best man alive."

Her tone was spontaneous, sincere. Haig could have taken her in his arms then and there. However, he escaped the difficulties naturally attendant upon such a step, and reluctantly reverted to more practical topics.

"The bishop is, in fact, so good to me," he said, "that I'm sure he'll even, if neces-

sary, forgive me for keeping your picture from him for a little while longer."

For a man ten years buried this was a draught of success, but there was this bitterness in the cup: it brought them to their parting. He left her with her suggestion that, as the bishop's nephew, he would see her soon and often, and, as he passed from the light of her home into the darkness of the nearly deserted street, he began dimly to discern how much that hope already meant to him.

John Haig was not given to introspection. He was far too emotional for the acquirement of that enervating habit of mind. The advent of a sudden desire or the coming of a pressing necessity drove him not to thought but to action. It was this temperamental aptitude which, in his early youth, had led to his downfall, and even in prison he had but accepted the most comforting theory advanced by others, and lived for that alone. Circumstance, however, could force upon him a conclusion, and that conclusion he would make an integral part of a faith for any sin-

gle article of which he would have suffered martyrdom unquestioningly. That was what had happened this evening, and that was why he bent glad returning steps towards the Express office, thrilled with the belief that he had just been vouchsafed another revelation of the divine.

He had come, almost literally, from the tomb. After a sleep of horrid dreams that had effaced the memory of men, he had been resurrected to a life every detail of which was strange to him. His heart was again the white tablet loved of imagery. He had gone to his work with large ideals and high hope, and the somewhat sordid reality that had confronted him at the outset had contained even for his near-sighted enthusiasm the promise of speedy disillusioning. Then, for the first time in a decade, he had talked with a pretty and not unsophisticated girl in whom the element of the fashionable would have been, to him, bewildering at any time. The sheer fact that, as he had just seen her, she was a more or less dazzling embodiment of crude, though polished, femininity was, by

the very force of its splendid disguise, the determining power in his enchantment. Prison discipline was still so far potent that he must translate all passion in the terms of spirit, but passion, though of an exalted sort, this girl had certainly inspired.

Upon the whole, he decided that he would postpone with Bishop Osgood his intended discussion of the ethical status of Billy Gwynne.

IV

A LEGATE OF THE PRESS

EVEN to the most violent of passions things have sometimes an annoying way of not happening, and, for the first few days succeeding the evening of his initial experience in journalism, it seemed to John Haig as if he were doomed to disappointment in his originally dreaded theory concerning the haunting influence of his Acrasia's family name. From the office no assignment sent him again into her world; while, in the few moments which his work allowed him with the bishop, loyalty upon the one hand and a boyish and beautiful perception of the holy character of this new tenderness upon the other, forbade him both designed and casual mention of the person and persons who most possessed his thoughts.

But though there was a lack of the precise

sort of work he just now so desired, work of every other sort was by no means wanting. The paper must have been, as Ben Donald had said, short-handed, for, within the week, this cub reporter had tasted of some of the most mature fruit that grows upon the very various branches of the anomalous profession's many-knotted trunk. The pleasing result was that John had speedily acquired something of the *savoir-faire* which is the whole secret of the work. His regular shift was supposedly the usual one from the first hour in the afternoon until the last in the night; but all newspaper "days" are arbitrarily formal, and Haig's evident willingness shortly resulted in lending to the allotted time a marvellous elasticity. His hours were frequently lengthened indefinitely and at either end, until, upon one occasion, he began work with an expected police raid at four o'clock of one morning and ended it with an unlooked-for stabbing affray at two of the morning following.

He was not, of course, intrusted with work which required either experience in the

collection of facts or skill in their presentation, but he had satisfactorily covered enough assignments, of qualities sufficiently diverse, to be justified in his feeling, as he drew his first ten dollars on the following Friday, that he was well on the way to becoming conversant with this one division of journalism and to be considerably tired in body and not a little sickened in soul.

From his ill-advised position he was compelled to observe that the press was indeed a mighty instrument, but he was driven by a similar force to confess that it was not exactly the sort of powerful engine which both fiction and fancy had painted it. He did not see how any good was to be done the public —and he knew that none was to be done the finer instincts of any of the individuals immediately concerned—by his ringing—as he had a day before been ordered to do—at a squalid house to ask a husband why his wife had cut her lover's throat an hour earlier. Like all the employés of a newspaper, from the new scrub-woman in the press-room to the supposedly seasoned city editor, he began

to feel that he could conduct the journal then making use of his valuable services on lines far more successful than those which it was at present pursuing, and he returned to his lonely chair in the local department devoutly thankful for the chance to rest that had been offered by Mr. Fealy's telling him to "stay around the office on emergency duty."

Generally speaking, this is the newspaper euphemism for doing nothing at all, but on this occasion the fates had decreed otherwise. Haig had not been "waiting" for fifteen minutes when the unwonted stillness of the office was broken by a heavy footfall and the sound of a half-whispered conversation from the city editor's room.

"Nobody but that new man," John heard Fealy's voice pronouncing.

"What does he amount to?" asked a tone that was strange.

The answer was lost to the ear, but its tenor was supplied by the quick rejoinder:

"Well, he'll have to do this time. Just now it looks as if this thing won't keep."

Then Haig's name was called, softly, he

thought, and with more consideration than theretofore, and he passed into the presence of the head of his department.

Fealy was chewing his accustomed quid, his face was more flushed, his blue eyes keener than ever. Beside him stood a tall, stout man with a blond mustache and a hurried air, to whom, as Mr. Thring, the editor-in-chief, Haig was rapidly presented.

"We've got a very delicate job for you to do," began Fealy, looking through and through the reporter, "and if you do it all right it may mean a good deal for you."

"There's no need of concealing from you, Mr. Haig," the hurried man put in—to his colleague's ill-concealed chagrin, "there's no need concealing from you that this is a thing for a much more experienced man. But there's nobody else about; the tip's exclusive, and we've reason to believe the person we want you to see is just going to get out of town as fast as he can. He doesn't know of the warrant yet, Fealy, but of course he'll get wind of it somehow, if he's guilty and

against the gang, so we believe he means to chuck the whole thing by running away."

"You've read the story we had this morning," asked Fealy, "on the rumours about something crooked in the contract for the new jail?"

Haig had read the head-lines carefully enough to permit of his now nodding assent.

"Well, we understand that a warrant's just been sworn out on the quiet for the chief contractor, a fellow named——"

"Elridge," supplied Mr. Thring.

"Yes, Elridge. The charges are fraud, conspiracy, and bribery—or something of that kind. He isn't sure about the warrant, but he's thinking of skipping. It's queer that he should—we can't make that out—but we get it straight that he is. Meanwhile, we've come into possession of that. Cast your eye over it."

He carefully handed Haig an envelope from which the reporter withdrew a slip of note-paper. It was evidently a letter, but was without any heading, written in a hurried hand and post-marked, as Mr. Thring

explained, the day before the award of contracts. John read:

"Dear Belle: Got that city job I was telling you about, but we certainly had to work for it and pay out a lot. We had the other envelopes opened, and it will cost us something for every bidder and a lot for councils. However, will be able to see you then a day earlier than I expected, so look for me by the same train the day previous.—Yours aff.—F. X. E."

"What a fool he was to write that!" Haig ventured to comment as he returned the convicting note.

"Young man," said Mr. Thring, "when you've been as long in this business as I have you won't be surprised at anything, especially if it's something a man does for a woman. Just once too often in his life every man's a fool for some woman."

But Fealy was anxious to get to work.

"Now, Mr. Haig," he ordered, "you take the envelope only. It may come in handy. What we want you to do is to nail Elridge,

if possible just as he's about to go, and get some sort of an interview before he clears out. Understand? Nobody else is likely to get it, and if you can land it, it will be a big beat, and ought to stir up politics in the morning. Get into his office somehow, and if he doesn't want to talk, make him talk."

"But be careful," added Mr. Thring, "to be perfectly honest with him and not to misquote him. We want to be square and we don't want any libel."

"His office," continued the city editor, "is somewhere in the Van Vendig building——"

"Fourth floor, I think."

"Yes, fourth floor. Get it now, and hurry up, and be sure you don't talk to any one about it, not even any one else in the office. It'll be a big story."

And Fealy dismissed his reporter with a great slap on the back.

Haig, rushing out with a pocket full of copy-paper, remembered those rumours, in fact, but indistinctly, and had, he reflected, replied somewhat at random when Fealy had

asked if he had read them. The city, he knew, had begun to build a new jail, and it had been whispered that the man who secured the contract had not been the lowest bidder. There had been ill-defined scandal connected with all public work since the present political machine had come into its complete control, but the favoured contractors had all been men whom it was more or less easy to connect with the administration, and—another point of difference—there had escaped no detail on which the struggling opposition could lay hold. Now, however, the Express, which was a machine paper—as, indeed, were all the local journals, save the ineffective Courier—had reason to believe that it had unearthed a scandal, which was rare news, and which could not be laid at the door of its own faction, since the last revolt against boss rule had resulted in temerity enough in the administration apparently to allow of the jail being attended to in the correct fashion. Finally, the suspected man was a stranger whose residence and business interests, of which little could be discov-

ered, were all in another city and another State.

A big story, indeed, but, for a still somewhat shy young man just beginning his second week of newspaper work, a story not without its difficulties. How he was to handle it Haig could not guess. As he threaded his way through the busy streets, he thought of a thousand schemes, but, one after the other, they all perished in the planning, until he found himself in the narrow stone hallway of the place he sought and, with his finger on the call-button of the elevator-shaft, desperately determined to leave the decision to chance.

Unlike its neighbours, the ground-glass door, before which he then was shortly pausing, had printed upon it the name of no firm, nothing, in fact, but its number. Below this, however, a simply, but carefully lettered card had been placed between wood-work and glass, and thereon were the words:

F. X. ELRIDGE,
Contractor and Builder.

The time for preparation having come and gone in vain, Haig's fine instinct for action asserted itself and, without weighing the consequences, he opened the door and entered unannounced.

V

IN THE STATE OF DENMARK

THE room was small but bright, with two windows opening upon the air-shaft at the farther end, a deserted typewriter-desk and a table-desk considerably littered with letters and an open ledger or two in the centre. Blue-print plans of the new prison were the only attempt at decorating the walls otherwise enhanced merely by the marks from the striking of many matches. There was a desk-chair, a few other chairs, and a telephone in one corner. The floor was bare, and Haig started at the noise made by his first step upon it.

Simultaneously with the opening of the front door, and because, no doubt, of the sound made thereby, another was thrown back opening upon an inner office, and some one peered out towards the reporter with a curious little snort of surprise.

The man was between Haig and the light, but the reporter noted that so much of him as could be seen was short and stout and puffy, dressed in dark blue serge of extravagant cut, and with a round fiercely coloured face, carefully curled small black mustache, snub nose, low brows, and rat-like dark eyes that revealed, even when seen in this way, the soul of a coward skulking behind the ill-suiting features of a bully.

"Hello!" said this person. "I thought I'd locked the door."

"I should have knocked," Haig suavely apologized, "but I did not know that your business hours were over so soon."

"They're not over," the man brusquely replied, "but I've got some very private business to attend to."

"Oh, then, I'd better not take up your time."

And Haig, with a smile which he meant to be knowing, made as if to back out.

His unwilling host was clearly of a suspicious turn.

"Not at all," he hastened to rejoin.

"That is, I suppose I can spare you a minute or two if it's very important. What can I do for you?"

Haig took the cue, banged the front door behind him, and strode to the desk in the centre of the room, making sure, as he did so, that there was no one else in the apartment beyond.

"Why," he said smilingly, "give me, of course, as you so kindly suggested, a minute or two."

The stranger hesitated, bit his mustache with a flash of singularly white teeth, and then came forward to the other side of the desk.

He was all that John had guessed—and more. Across his broad waistcoat was stretched an unnecessarily heavy watch-chain, his hands were thick, and his fingers, between two of which he held the still smoking end of a cigar, were adorned with one large ring cut by a connotative old English E and another bearing a diamond somewhat too generous of size and water.

John looked at him squarely, but he did

not shift from the reporter the rude glare which the latter was beginning to acknowledge he fully deserved.

"Are you Mr. Elridge?" he, however, asked.

"Yes."

"Mr. F. X. Elridge?"

"That's my name."

"The man who has the contract for the new jail?"

"Yes, yes! How many times must I tell you?"

John was growing as unnecessarily angry as his victim was annoyed, but his emotion took the ugly form of perverse geniality.

"You don't have to tell me ever again," he said. "It's a pleasant day, Mr. Elridge."

He had still not the remotest idea of how he should set about the matter in hand, and he was fencing, consequently, for an opening.

The contractor straightway supplied it.

"I don't suppose you came here to talk about the weather," he snapped. "And if you're not very busy, I am. What do you want?"

Here was the issue. Haig drew a deep breath, kept his gaze steadily upon the contractor and, seriously enough now, began:

"Mr. Elridge, I don't blame you for talking this way, but I have to tell you something unpleasant—something really very ugly—and I honestly don't know exactly how to begin."

Elridge's glance grew wild for a moment and then dropped. His right hand fumbled with some papers on the desk. He sat down, the cigar falling unregarded from his fingers. But, so long as there was a chance to exhibit bravado in its stead, he was not of the fibre to show his terror. As Haig drew a chair opposite him he looked up, therefore, at once. His words were commonplace enough.

"No trouble at the jail, I hope?" he asked.

John measured his reply.

"You will have no trouble with the jail," he said—"just yet."

"What in thunder do you mean?"

Elridge rapped out the words in a panic,

and the next instant was palpably ashamed of them. But the next instant was too late; Haig was quickly following his advantage.

"I see you understand," he pursued. "Well, then, to tell the truth, Mr. Elridge, there was a warrant sworn out for you this afternoon before Magistrate—I think it was Magistrate Jordan."

The contractor started, but immediately grew cautiously overcontemptuous.

"Poof! What's the charge?"

"There are three charges: fraud, conspiracy to defraud the city, and bribery."

Elridge rose slowly, and walking to the window, looked out for a while, his hands, deep in his pockets, loudly rattling some coin.

John bided his time and was finally rewarded.

Elridge turned.

"Well," he said, "of course I'm not going to talk to you. It's all confounded nonsense, and you know that as well as I do. All I want to do just now is to get the preliminaries over with."

He stepped towards the telephone and

raised a hand to take the receiver from its hook.

"Wait a moment, please, Mr. Elridge!" cried Haig.

The fellow wheeled upon him sharply.

"What for?" he blustered. "I want to get my bail and my lawyer. Of course, I'll waive a hearing. I must hurry up and arrange things. I've more important matters to think of than a lot of shyster political tricks. Go ahead and read your warrant."

"I was afraid you'd made some mistake," said Haig, blandly once more. "I haven't any warrant."

"Why, what——"

"I said only that one had been sworn out."

Elridge almost fell into his chair. He looked at Haig blankly. Then suddenly his whole face blazed into relief, into action.

"Oh!" he laughed hysterically. "Then you're from Billy? Why in thunder didn't you say so? Well, they'll never serve their warrant. I'm just ready to scoot, and they can't prove anything on Billy without me.

But why did he send such a stupid ass as you?"

"I think you again misapprehend me," corrected John. "I am not from 'Billy,' whoever he is."

"What! Then who the devil are you from?"

"The Globe-Express."

"Huh? Oh, no; no you're not. The Express would be with us if it was really on."

"As to that, I don't know anything. I was sent here by men who ought to be better informed than I am on such matters—by Mr. Fealy, our city editor, and by Mr. Thring, our editor-in-chief."

"Oh, no you don't! You're from the other side. You're from the Courier."

Here was a puzzling state of affairs, but for answer Haig displayed his new police-card.

"Well, what does the Express want, anyhow?" asked Elridge.

"An interview," John replied. "I was sent here to get it, and I've had the word of the men I mentioned—though I suppose

that's no business of yours—that they intend to print it to-morrow morning."

"Then I don't know what's happened. But I can't stop to worry over your fool paper. I'll have to cut. And anyhow, you may just lay to one thing: you won't get any interview out o' me if I have to kick you downstairs."

"Thank you," said Haig, "but I fancy I've got about all that's necessary."

Elridge, the rat-like eyes now bulging from his head, rushed upon the reporter with apoplectic cheeks and trembling forefinger, which he shook in John's unmoved face.

"Print it!" he yelled. "Print it, then, and be damned! Every word'll be libellous, and I'll bankrupt your paper and have you all in jail before I'm done with you. I only wish you would print it!"

"We will, Mr. Elridge, we will. But don't talk about libel." He waved a bit of paper in the air. "You remember your letter to Belle?"

The contractor snatched at and secured the paper, but Haig had suffered another in-

spiration, and was already following a daring plan of campaign.

"That is only an empty envelope," he said, calmly enough. "The letter, I am sorry to say, is at the office. You see, we know all about it. Come now, I'll tell you what I'll do. I know there's bigger game in this than you, so I'll 'phone Fealy, and I think I can arrange it that if you'll come away from here out of danger and give me a signed statement, I'll agree not to use a word of this story—that is, the part of it that I know about—until you're safe at least out of the State."

Something in his air must have carried a degree of conviction to the breast of the panic-stricken Elridge, for the man fell at once into a fit of tripping pledges, expostulations, and excuses, from the total incoherence of which Haig escaped to the telephone, where he was soon in animated conversation with his delighted city editor, to whom he made as clear as possible the state of the case.

"This man," he concluded, in a desperate effort to conceal the disgust which was fast overmastering his excitement, "says he'll

give up a written confession—I'll see that it's as detailed as possible—providing we pass our word not to print the thing for two weeks. He wants that much additional chance to get away."

"All right," came Fealy's answer. "If we don't do as he says we're sure to lose a beat, and if he sticks to his bargain we ought to get a good one. Be sure, though, to see that he don't fake you. You can promise him anything for me just so long as it'll get the story. Take him to a private room at the Hamilton, and don't spare expense."

Thus, within fifteen minutes they were in a cab, and by the time the hour struck, Elridge, in the crimson-plush parlour of a down-town hotel, had snatched up his suitcase and was handing Haig a hurried but lengthy document.

"You promise me two weeks?" he asked.

"Two weeks," John made answer.

"Well, you see that I have to trust you. It's all up to you. Here. Look this thing over; see if it's all there, and then I must bolt."

Haig had been suffering from a moral reaction, and had refrained from superintending the writing. He was beginning to recover from the tempestuous attack of that intermittent fever technically known as the news sense, and was rather ashamed of the almost involuntary and certainly thoughtless part he had played in the whole wretched drama. But now that he was in for it, there remained an obvious, if unpleasant, duty to be performed in behalf of his employers. He must see that Elridge had stuck to his part of the bargain.

He took up the damp, scrawled sheets. Considering the man's emotion, he had been wonderfully clear and marvellously exact as to detail. The confession, even though unsupported and that of a runaway, carried conviction along with it. Its story ran at first very much as he had begun to expect it should. The other contractors had been bought off, their envelopes opened, the bids changed, and several members of the city councils sealed, with golden wafers, to help and silence. All this was explicit. Names,

witnesses, and often dates were supplied. And then, at the close, with a similar terrible exactness, with a like multitude of careful, shameless detail, with the same unmistakable note of authenticity, there followed a statement calculated to convince even John Haig that Elridge had been all along acting under the personal direction of another man; that he had been, in his every crime, merely this man's representative; that he had been only the hand that executed the orders of an utterly splendid and unscrupulous brain. The principal was Billy Gwynne.

Haig had been skimming through the paper until he came to that. He doubted his eyes; read back several paragraphs, saw the inevitable approach of the revelation, and then finished the account word by word.

As he ended the consequences of the thing were blazoned before him. The wealth of circumstance, the thousand chances of corroboration, the mention of places and dates, left, in his bewildered mind, no room for doubt. The world, he fancied, would, with all the force of its old love for tearing the

mighty from their seats, be convinced far more easily and speedily.

He held out the paper.

Elridge was at a loss to gather his meaning.

"Here!" commanded Haig.

"What do you mean?"

"Mean? I mean I want you to take back this paper of yours and tear it up before my eyes—and then go."

For a moment Elridge gazed at him with open mouth and empty eyes. Then Haig could see the light of understanding flare into the vulgar face, and the man, with a gurgle of wild delight, snatched the paper and crunched it between his hands.

The next instant, however, his whole expression had changed, and he was smoothing out the document, carefully, deliberately, on the table.

"What are you about?" asked John.

"Just this," said Elridge, turning in half-defiance. "If your paper won't use this, some other one will. It's worth five hundred dollars if it's worth a cent."

"Oh, I guess we'd use it all right if we got it! But do you mean to say that you want it to be used? Or would you sell it only for more than I've offered you? Heavens, man, you surely don't mean that you want it to appear!"

"Want it to appear? Of course I do—now. No, I don't ask any more than to get out of this. But I do intend that this thing shall be used. You can bet your life I do. What do I owe Billy Gwynne, that I should run away with his dirty work all on my shoulders? I guess he thinks this is a smart trick of his, but I'll show him whether it is or not!"

"You must be drunk! How's he played any trick on you?"

"Oh, don't take me for such a fool! I can see through this easy enough. Something's gone wrong at the front, and Gwynne thought he'd scare me and get me to skip so's the whole thing 'd be put on me. Well, I'll skip all right, but I'll fix things first so's he'll only wish he could skip too!"

The fellow was leaning on the table, his

body shaking, his face distorted with malice. He gasped for breath and then, as he ran on, a sense of conviction burst down the evident motive of what he said, and swept upon Haig with a wild flood of certainty.

"Look here," the man continued; "you've got your paper to think about, haven't you? You say they'd use this, and if they sent you out for it I guess they will. You look like the sort that do their duty. Well, who's your duty to, eh? Isn't it to the sheet you're working for? You can't throw them down now—you can't afford to. You'd lose your job in a minute. This thing's a big item. It means the showing up of about all that's rotten in this town—and there's plenty of that. I'm gettin' away, but I'm only a sort of State's evidence. You can easy prove every word of what I wrote. And if Billy Gwynne gets into trouble, it'll be about the first time the real criminal had to suffer instead of the poor ass he gets to work for him."

Haig's brain was running like a mill-race. The man, whatever his motive, was, in the abstract, right. John's duty was to his em-

ployers. If he thought ill of the work they offered him he could leave it. But he could not leave it without such a notice as he would have expected from them, and in the mean time he must furnish faithful service.

That was enough for a man of action. He put out his hand.

"Give it here," he said.

Elridge read his purpose in his face.

"You'll print it?" he asked.

Haig shuddered at the cunning of the tone.

"I'll do my duty," he replied.

Elridge handed him the confession.

"You don't know how much I thank you for all——"

"Don't thank me," said John; "thank your own rotten soul. If you want my opinion of you, it's that you're a Judas. Now get out."

The fellow still had it in him to attempt to bluster.

"Look here, sir!" he cried. "I'd have you know that I may be a tool, but it was

for better men than you, men with some nerve, and I'm not going to have you——"

"You'd better get out," said Haig calmly. "If you don't, I'll give you something that will lay you up till that warrant's served."

Elridge leaped to the door and through it. He thrust his head again into the room.

"Don't forget; you said you'd give me two weeks," he whined.

Haig was lighting a cigarette.

"Two weeks," he replied, and held the burning match in his fingers until he heard Elridge's footsteps clattering down the stairs.

VI

DOCTORS DISAGREE

For a man who hated thought as much as John Haig hated it, the next quarter-hour was a difficult one. For some minutes, indeed, he determinedly thrust from him all consideration of the multitude of questions that nevertheless seemed hammering at the frail deal-door of the room. He sat at the marble-topped table and traced its anæmic pale-blue veins until they sprang into a hopeless tangle under his very eyes. He counted over and over again the articles of cheap furniture—the cane-bottom chairs set squarely against the walls, the orthodox horse-hair sofas, the screaming lithographs in frames of white and gilt—and each time he arrived at a different result. He marvelled at the red plush carpet, and lost himself in the labyrinthian mazes of the yellow wall-paper. He did

anything, in short, save the thing that he knew he must, sooner or later, do. And then, at last, the clang of a car-bell from the street woke him to the fact of the life of which he was now an inevitable portion, and enabled him to bring himself together through the resolve that he would not leave this gaudy place of detention—just as he could not escape from his hideous state of indecision—until he had definitely fixed upon the course which he was to pursue.

To make certain of his position, he first reread Elridge's confession, and thereby did away with every lingering hope. The result of the publication of the fellow's admissions was too clear to admit of a doubt, and the cat's-paw who had written it was by this time well on the way to freedom.

Why was he? Who had allowed him to escape, and upon what authority? The thought struck Haig like a blow. He even rose, and, before he had sufficiently recovered from the shock to realize the futility of the action thus involuntarily begun, made a step or two towards the door. Here was, in

truth, a novel view of the matter and a late one. Though in so doing he had but followed the precedents of ordained justice in its attitude towards State's evidence, his power, whether or no he had been right in daring to sit as a judge, at most did not extend to the dismissal of a confessed, even if minor, criminal. Nor could he find, as yet, excuse on the ground of mere obedience to orders, since he knew that the next question about to present itself had to do with whether he should obey those orders in their fundamental significance and surrender that confession to the dragon of the press. He took refuge, therefore, in what, though a seeming weakness, was still most likely the simple truth. He had been governed throughout the afternoon, first by a series of impulses resulting from professional ignorance, and latterly by a confusion consequent upon his sudden and unexpected discovery. For what was past he could scarcely, then, with justice, hold himself to blame. Past it at any rate was, and the least criminal clean gone. There now remained the rest of the gang,

and with them the consideration of a far greater difficulty, the difficulty, in a word, of the greatest criminal of them all.

Haig got up and strode to the window, lighting another cigarette and seeking strength from the busy panorama of the strenuous street.

What, after all, he asked himself, was William Gwynne to him? The probable favour of the introductory letter to the paper was obviously not here to be considered. The man was therefore at most the father of an attractive girl whom Haig had seen but once. Perhaps he did love her, but what of that? It was the girl he loved, and love and business—not to say love and justice—were two entirely separate things. Besides, he stood here, he did not doubt, with his hand upon the knob of a door which he had but to throw open in order to reveal the crimes of the men who were robbing the city and betraying their public trust. If he only turned his hand, these men would meet their just deserts. If he refused, if he but burned one little scrap of paper, the loss of which could

so easily be accounted for—and, though he never thought of that, so well paid for in another quarter—then the thieves would continue in their high estate—for the runaway would surely be made a scape-goat—among soft sounds and pleasant sights and beautiful faces that loved them.

There, alas, was the rub. It was his first personal experience with the practical working of the doctrine of vicarious atonement. His own crime he had committed when singularly alone in the world, and the four walls of his prison had shut him in before he could learn of any consequent suffering to his own blood relatives in a distant State. But now he saw that, the wide world over, the innocent must suffer with the guilty and for them, must, in fact, suffer far more than they. He revolted from the gigantic barbarity of it, he sickened at the realization of the broad sweep of the great universal laws which make for their shadowy goal with so relentless a disregard of all they crush in their passage. Everywhere he seemed to see the negation of the individual to the moral

syllogism, everywhere the sacrifice of the one to the many.

And what, at last, of this one, the one whose face rose up to him there and pressed against his own the warm red lips of life? Dream lips they could not seem, charged though they were not with their sudden laughter, but with unfamiliar pleading. The picture grew until it racked his soul. Her fingers tore at his heart-strings, her eyes convicted him. Those lips to plead! That face had never known a sorrow, never yet had looked on shame. To what, then, and why was he condemning it? By what right did he, as a god, sit all this day in judgment who still bore upon his pallid face the mark of the jail?

But with a tremendous effort he put the thought from him. Whatever else went down, duty remained. Privately he was, argue as he might, an employé acting under definite rules. So much of those orders as had been morally doubtful had, he reasoned, been already executed. He could not see how such faults could in any wise invalidate what

followed, all of which he conceived to be righteous enough. If he did not like his work he could give it up, but not in the midst of an assignment, not by withholding that of which he could plainly never have gained possession save through his employers. The confession belonged to them to use as they saw fit. The responsibility was no longer his own. Having acquitted himself of his task he might, if he thought the work unworthy, leave it, but not without giving to those now, by his own consent, in authority over him the warning he would have expected of them. Meanwhile, he must furnish faithful service.

On the other hand, he realized that his duty had a public bearing and command upon him. Thus considered, his part would enter into the matter not at all. Here was only a duty to be done by a man who had paid the penalty for his own crime, had started with the slate cleaned by ten years from a private wrong, against men who lived and moved luxuriously and battened, not on any one person, but upon the whole public. He had betrayed a private confidence, they

the trust of a cityful. The rich and powerful must be as amenable to punishment as the poor and the weak. They would have as fair a chance as he had had. Afterward he must do what little he could—he did not see the egotism of it—to alleviate the wrongs of the innocent sufferers; now he must do his duty.

He crammed the hateful paper into an inner pocket and returned to the office of the Globe-Express. The other men were beginning to gather from their afternoon occupations, but Haig was no sooner seen than he was sent to the room of the city editor.

Fealy met him with beaming smile and outstretched hand.

"Well, my boy!" he cried, "you've got it?"

"Yes," said Haig shortly.

"I congratulate you! I congratulate you on landing the biggest story that's broken loose in this town for five years! There aren't many old hands could 'a' done it, and I'll see that you're rewarded accordingly. Now, then, tell me all about it."

Haig, instinctively withholding the names of all others concerned, complied as well as his thorough disgust with the whole matter would permit him.

Fealy watched him closely through the narrative, following every word, interjecting a salient question or two, and ever and anon rubbing a pair of delighted hands. But towards the end he grew impatient.

"So you went to the hotel?" he finally interrupted.

"Yes, we went there," continued John. "We got the room——"

"And he wrote the confession?"

"Yes."

"A full one?"

"So far as I could see he didn't omit a single necessary detail."

"Well, then, let's have it."

There was a suggestion of greed in the man's outstretched claw that made Haig grow suddenly cautious.

"You're not going to use it at once?" he asked.

"Certainly. We're saving three columns, starting with two on the first page. Hurry up; let's see it."

"Why, Mr. Fealy, you—I thought that, over the 'phone, you gave me to understand that you weren't going to use it for two weeks."

"Oh, what's that got to do with it? Let's have the confession."

"It's got everything to do with it. Elridge wouldn't have given up if I hadn't promised not to use the stuff for a week."

"Well, I can't quibble with you. Let me have the story."

Haig saw that he was in for a fight, and his nostrils expanded with delight at this final relief from a strain which had become well-nigh unbearable. He had, however, as he replied, perfect control of his voice:

"Excuse me," he said, "but this isn't a case of quibbling. By your authority I promised this man something, and because I promised him he entered into a contract with me."

Fealy, between awakening indignation

and a genuine amazement, hammered the table with his red fist.

"Look here, you young fool!" he shouted. "I don't allow my reporters to talk to me in that way, and I'll have you know it at once! You've landed a good story and it's gone to your head, so I'll be easy on you this one time, but it's got to end right here. Give me that confession."

"No," said John Haig.

Fealy sprang to his feet with a bound that shook the whole frail room, sent his crashing chair to bits on the floor behind him, and swept a pile of ancient papers in a cloud of dust to the reporter's very shoes.

For a moment he could not speak at all. His face was purple with anger, his eyes snapped fire, yet behind it all there was evident a sense of unreality, a seeming inability to understand the possibility of such flat disobedience of orders. Expecting a torrent of vituperation, Haig stood bravely to his post. But the torrent was withheld. Suddenly the city editor mastered his pas-

sion, and in a voice measured though shaken said:

"Mr. Haig, you will give me that story at once, and then go out of this office for good. We do not want you about here any more."

"Very well," responded John. "I'll go, but I'll take the story along with me."

Then the torrent descended. It was all the worse for the temporary delay, and it was sufficiently violent to meet every requirement of the occasion. Fealy damned the reporter to the nethermost hell, and when he paused it was but for breath.

"You're a thief," he succinctly concluded, "a common thief—that's what you are! That story belongs to us, and if you take it out of this room I'll see that you're arrested."

"The story," replied Haig, hot with the sting of the last insult, "doesn't belong to you until a week from to-day. In fact, I don't know that it belongs to you at all, and I'm sure you couldn't arrest me for doing what I please with it. At any rate, I know you wouldn't dare to stand the showing-up. But if I'm a thief, what do you think you

are? You've got this thing on certain pretences, and I propose to see that they're not false ones. At first I'd have given you the story if you'd just have promised again not to use it till the right time. Now, I know that if you can't be straight with Elridge you can't be straight with me. With this thing in my pocket I can get on any paper in town, and you know it. You're a cheat, Mr. Fealy; you're the kind of man I wouldn't play cards with, and I'm sure I'm as glad to be quit of such company as you say you are to have me go."

He was about to turn on his heel, but almost at once Fealy began again, this time along a new line of attack.

The man well knew the value of the story, and saw that for the present, at least, he was in Haig's hands. He accordingly made the one play whereby he could avoid an ultimate loss of this important piece of news.

"I may have been hasty, Mr. Haig," he said, "but you'd better let me talk to you. It's this way, you see: A reporter is like a soldier, and of course his superior officer

can't have any insubordination. That's all there is about it. Now, a soldier, too, must obey orders, and so must a reporter. He's got to do what he's told, and not ask any questions. He's not to blame for obeying orders. If the orders are bad it's only the man who gives 'em who's to blame. Well, I'm the man who gives the orders in this shop. You hand me over that confession—that's the order now. You don't know what use I'm going to make of it. I'll even go so far as to let you off of the writing a line about the thing. Then, you see, if anybody's to blame, it's me."

Haig despaired of making himself clear. However—

"Mr. Fealy," he said, "I don't see it that way. If there's a bad law it isn't a citizen's duty to obey it, and even if a reporter is like a soldier—which I don't believe he is—I can't see how a soldier can think that he's got to obey orders that make him do criminal things."

"But you agree to obey orders when you come on a paper," argued Fealy. "Every re-

porter who takes a job on a local staff agrees to do what he is told to do, and the city editor who takes him on agrees to take all the blame."

"If I wrote a libel I'd be as open to arrest for it as you'd be."

"Oh, well, then, look at it from another way. This fellow Elridge is a rascal. You'll only be handing him over to justice by printing the thing as soon as possible."

"Then a quicker way would be to go out and warn the police, and the quickest would have been not to have given him the first chance of escape."

"But you can't think that you can be held to a bargain that you practically made under pressure."

"I wasn't under half the pressure he was, and he lived up to his part of the contract."

"But he's a criminal, and you don't have to keep faith with a criminal. Why, the detectives do this sort of thing every day."

"Well, Mr. Fealy, I'm not a detective, I'm a reporter. I may be a poor one, but I'm

not a detective, anyhow. The two jobs are mighty different, though you seem to be getting them mixed up right along. When I make a bargain I stick to it as long as the other fellow does."

"Then you're compounding a felony; you're letting this fellow get away."

"They were your orders at the start, and for the rest, I'm just following a method of the courts and the police you like to set up as examples of squareness in this sort of thing. I let him turn a sort of State's evidence so as to get the bigger fish."

For Fealy this statement contained a bit of fresh news.

"You mean to say," he asked, "that there are bigger fish?"

Once more an instinctive nicety kept Haig from mentioning any name other than that already known to Fealy, but he replied:

"About the biggest in the puddle, I judge."

"And you've got the details there?"

"Yes."

"Who is it?"

"I can't tell you until two weeks from to-night."

But again Fealy's news-sense got the better of his discretion.

"Oh, hang your morals!" he cried. "See here, I'm boss here, and I want that story. Am I going to get it or not, that's the question?"

"I want you to listen to me for a minute, Mr. Fealy. I want you to hear my side of this case. The story will keep as well as not. If that warrant was sworn out secretly, nobody'll be the wiser for a week at least, and even if the other papers do get on, you can print the same thing they print—you'll get the same news from the same source—and then you can spring this beat on them when the time's up. I promise you it'll keep, and I promise you that, from your point of view, it's big enough to be worth your while. I don't want to be nasty; all I want to do is to keep my bargain. It's a fair one, and I'll nurse this thing in the mean time and verify it, so that it will be all the better in the end."

He had hardly finished, and Fealy had

not had a moment in which to frame a very evidently angry reply when there was a noise at the door, and Mr. Thring, with his usual air of uncertain hurry and innocuous detachment, entered the room.

"Well, how's the story?" he asked, sauntering up to the desk.

Haig at once descended from his high key, but Fealy remained at top pitch.

"Why, this fellow says he promised Elridge to hold the thing for two weeks, and refuses to give it up."

"Mr. Fealy ordered me to promise him," corrected Haig.

"It was the only way to get the story," explained the city editor.

Mr. Thring nervously fumbled with some coins in his high-cut pocket.

"Hum-m," he said. "That's a pity."

"A pity?" gasped Fealy. "Why?"

"Because, if we made a promise to the blackguard, of course we'll have to keep it."

VII

AFTER-DINNER CRIMINOLOGY

WHATEVER else might be said of him, Billy Gwynne was essentially a product of the latter part of the nineteenth century, a creature of contemporary conditions. In any previous age the man would have been impossible. Under imperial Rome he would have been a colonial governor; in mediæval Germany he would have been a robber-baron; and under the first French Empire he might even have developed into a Talleyrand; but at no other time preceding the present could he have been precisely Billy Gwynne.

Physically he was a man of commanding height and breadth, always carefully dressed and to the best advantage. He had gray hair and mustache, heavy eyebrows of the same colour, which contrasted strongly with a face of uniform crimson, and sharp gray eyes

that nevertheless conveyed the general impression of kindliness. But he was a person of too wide an experience and too broad a knowledge of the world to allow these trifling superficialities to become an adequate expression of his genuine self.

William Stuyvesant Logan Gwynne was his real name, and his birth had been all that the name implies. He was the youngest of four sons born into one of the oldest and best-connected families of the city, even of the country. It had also, at one time, been one of the most wealthy families, but that day had passed a generation earlier, and the young brothers had been brought up behind the scenes of poverty-stricken pride. They had been taught that this was for them far more honourable than the convenient riches of their embarrassing friends, and they had been nurtured on the theory that the only fit and worthy way for them to redeem the family fortunes was to marry wealth of a respectability equal to that of their own poverty. Above all, they had been taught to dread as their final shame the slightest con-

tamination of bourgeoisie, and nothing, they had always been told, was quite so bourgeois as politics. This lesson three of them had learned so well that, being puny and unattractive youths, they had died bachelors within a short time after their parents, quite as poor and as proud and as lonely as they.

Not so William. He had mastered a lesson of a very different sort; one, in fact, which he was afterward reported to have summed up in the phrase that he had, early in life, got his "belly full of shabby gentility." Certainly he developed, in the first flush of boyhood, a remarkably persistent instinct for what is commonly known as the main chance. In the pursuit of that goal he never bothered about the companions with whom he had, on the way, to associate, and when he would return home from an unheard-of portion of the city with his pockets filled by other boys' marbles, the knowledge of the sort of lads upon whom he had preyed was far more painful to his family than the simple fact of his tendencies towards gaming. Neither fact, however, either then or later,

ruffled the equanimity of William. His games of chance, judging from their invariable results, were games that he had thoroughly mastered, and, having by some freak of atavism been born with the power of attracting and using men, he so consistently developed his talent to its extremest limit that, by not inquiring too closely into the nature of the material he used so long as he could safely use it, he had some years since become something possible only in the present era, and rare enough even there—a successful gentleman-political boss.

So far as Society was concerned, he had always struck it squarely between the eyes. He believed that a Gwynne had to be accepted as a Gwynne *per se*, and Society paid tribute to his perspicacity by kissing the hand that dealt the blows.

The first and worst of these blows was his marriage. Had all other things been equal, Billy Gwynne would naturally have preferred to choose a woman unmistakably of his own set. But other things were just then by no means equal. There had been in

the army of finance a general panic, which had left dowerless the some half-dozen girls who would otherwise have been in every respect eligible, and there was fortune and power to be had by an alliance with the daughter of a certain soap-manufacturer turned senator. Gwynne had himself suffered not a little in the slump of the market. Consequently he did not hesitate. He chose for fortune and power and soap.

The result, as always, proved his wisdom. Louise Divins was a quiet, pleasant-looking woman, a woman, indeed, almost too "proper" for the proper sphere whereinto she was thus translated. A bit old-fashioned, the death of her father, however, soon made up for all her shortcomings, and left to his only child the entire sum total of a most substantial property.

The receipt of this little addition did not change Gwynne's course in life. Rather it confirmed it; went, in brief, towards making it more severely certain. Consequently, upon the birth of Phyllis he did gather up again—and easily enough—the loose ends of his

social existence, but he went deeper and deeper into politics. He went, to tell the truth, so deep that he was never seen to rise above the surface of the ocean of publicity.

And that was what he wanted. His ambition was to sit, like Neptune, safely beneath the tempests of the wave-tops, there to control from his sequestered throne tempest and current as well. The name of William Gwynne seldom appeared in the lists of campaign committees. It was never seen among the "spellbinders," much less upon a ticket. Yet the hand of Billy Gwynne never let slip its hold of the reins that drew tight the bit in the mouths of the public horses, and his whip was ever silently playing over those horses' heads. At the door of his large office in the most elaborate business building there was no card to indicate that the lessee engaged in any occupation whatever. But the anteroom was always thronged with a motley gathering, and from the innermost chamber went forth that still small voice which predetermined every political movement in the city, from the election of a mayor and the grant-

ing of a franchise to the appointment of a suburban policeman or the dismissal of a janitor from a coloured school. Gwynne's lieutenants included every municipal and State office-holder in the town, and the rank and file of his army spread from the main offices of the great corporations until it was finally lost in the shadows of alleys and of tenements. How the man had gained his absolute control nobody could precisely tell. Nobody would or could directly connect him with any one movement of the machine. But everybody knew that the machine was run to please him, and Billy Gwynne knew who it was that ran it.

This was the method that made it possible for the man to maintain the respectable figure which was his secondary delight. Society feared him and was both unable and unwilling to prove evil against him. He was successful, pleasant, and, above all, he was a Gwynne. Society refused to believe that so seemingly perfect a gentleman could be an unscrupulous jobster, and accordingly rejoiced that one of its members should be di-

vinely commissioned to redeem municipal politics. Bishop Osgood would not, for his part, think that so devout and charitable a churchman could be anything that was at all wrong, and so made much of him always, and, on this Monday evening in particular—the Monday following Haig's violent interview with his city editor—had him and his family to dinner.

It was a small party. Besides the Gwynnes there was only Marsden Payne—a stout, healthy, happy young heir to millions and recipient of Mrs. Osgood's overflowing affections—the bishop and his wife, of course, and Haig.

John was eager for another sight of Phyllis and for a meeting with her father. The few days which had passed since his interview with Elridge had not been easy ones. Mr. Thring's dictum that the Globe-Express kept its promises had secured him a temporary secession of hostilities; but this was at best only an armed peace, and its result had been but a growing nervousness and a general disgust. Fealy had not a word to say to

him except in overloading him with work and sending him upon the most nauseating assignments. Only the night before, the story of the secret warrant and Elridge's escape had somehow leaked out, and the morning papers were full of double-leaded speculation, while John, worn by hours of mental torture, knew that he held the key to the situation safely buttoned against his breast.

Phyllis greeted him with civil pleasure, even with a degree of personal delight, for her picture had appeared in form enough flattering and in place sufficiently prominent. She had, moreover, all the outsider's interest in the romantic profession, and she was now at once taken with the appearance of this slim, straight, pale young man, quiet of manner and faultless of dress, who formed so great a contrast to the redolently eligible and assiduously attentive Marsden Payne.

The latter, however, was too zealous an admirer to allow her either before or during the dinner more than a word with Haig, and, as if not content with this, when the

cloth had been removed and the women had left the candle-lighted room, he proceeded, while touching a match to his cigarette, to administer another shock to the reporter.

"That's a queer affair, Mr. Gwynne," he began, "about that fellow Elridge."

Haig shot a swift glance at the politician, but Gwynne, raising a steady glass to his lips, was only mildly interested.

"Very odd," he granted, "from what I could gather from the papers."

"I am afraid," said the bishop, "that it is only another form of the old story of corrupt politics. It is a pity we can't have more men like you, Mr. Gwynne, interested in our public affairs."

"Thank you. But I hardly think this can be called a political matter. The charges weren't printed, of course, and the whole story was very vague, but it looks to me more like mere business rottenness. If the man had been hand in glove with corrupt politicians he wouldn't have felt the need of running away."

Haig leaned well over the table.

"Not unless they had a pretty strong case against him," he suggested.

"But he did stand in with some politicians," persisted Payne. "I dare say you must have met him now and again, Mr. Gwynne?"

Gwynne was cutting a cigar-end.

"Now and again," he carelessly assented.

"What sort of a fellow did he seem to be?"

"I didn't see enough of him to judge. Commonplace, I suppose, or I'd have remembered him better."

Haig drew a long breath. This man must be madly confident.

"I can't help hoping they won't catch him," he ventured.

Gwynne smiled.

"Why not?" he asked. "I hope, Mr. Haig, you're not one of those sentimental people who always feel sorry for a man just because he's caught stealing."

"Oh, I don't think John's that," the bishop nervously interposed, "but I confess that

I myself always have some sympathy in these cases."

"One always feels that it's only the scape-goat that's caught," remarked Haig dryly. He was peevishly intent upon making Gwynne feel.

"And we never know what temptations he has met with," added Bishop Osgood.

Gwynne's red face grew a shade redder. He turned to the churchman.

"It is all very well for you to feel that way," he said. "It does you honour, of course, and all that, but, as a practical man, I can't see why, if a fellow's guilty, he shouldn't suffer. That's what the law's for. If there are bigger criminals in the thing, hook them too, but that's no reason why the little scoundrels shouldn't get their deserts."

"Hear, hear!" cried Payne.

"I'm not denying that——" began the bishop.

"Nor I," interpolated John.

"But I must admit," the clergyman continued, his placid blue eyes narrowing incongruously, "to more sympathy for the little

fellows, as they call them. They're generally so much weaker."

There are few things so delightful to the best laymen as baiting a cleric with his own precepts, and in the good-natured discussion which followed this declaration, Bishop Osgood needed all the support which John, amazed at Gwynne's words, and hurt by the unintended slurs of Payne, could give him.

At last it was Haig who thus grew a trifle ruffled.

"Your attitude," he said, addressing his two adversaries, "is as one-sided as you think ours. The small criminal is easier caught than the big one, the offender against person runs a thousand chances of detection to each one risked by the offender against the public. Both ought to be punished, of course, but you accept the big one just because he isn't caught, and all pounce on the little one just because he is."

"You can't want us to take him up after he's caught," laughed Gwynne.

"You'll logically have to, sooner or later, after he's served his term."

"Certainly not," rapped out Payne.

"Why," urged John, "he's paid the penalty, hasn't he?"

"And come out worse than he went in." The boy had graduated from his college three years before, but there was still much of the sophomore about him. "I was reading," he continued, "only this morning, the latest figures of criminal recidivism, and they showed, instead of the old twenty-six per cent, over fifty-nine for crimes against person, and nearly eighty for crimes against property."

"Then the fault is ours," said the bishop. "If we say prison is the place to reform a criminal, we should see to it that prisons reform."

"That theory is all right," interposed Gwynne, "but it's dangerous in practice. It gets to be sentimentalism. Most of the experiments of that sort have made jail pleasanter for the men who go there than the living they got outside."

"The thing was never practised so much as it is to-day," persisted Payne, "and yet

there never was so large a percentage of recidivism."

John pushed his cigarette-ash angrily into the plate before him.

"There's something wrong with it all," he cried inconsequently. "There's something wrong, and as long as people look at it the way you do there won't be any remedy. Society experiments for century after century, and finally decides that such and such a crime deserves such and such a punishment, and then when the man's taken the medicine, Society says it's not enough."

But the bishop was professionally a man of peace.

"I'm afraid," he said, "that the fault must be in the individual, not in society. The thing you're speaking of naturally happens in some cases, but not in all. When it does happen, it must mean that the man is more guilty than was thought, and society's repugnance is an instinctive sense of this. Society, after all, is a part of the world's plan, and in that way it may be said to be divine. Why shouldn't it, then, be vouch-

safed such a sense, an instinctive social conscience, in some way we cannot understand?"

Haig looked at his uncle in amazement, but before he could reply the bishop had risen, and as they passed out of the room Gwynne was saying:

"Anyhow, the law's for punishment. It's not for coddling. When a man's guilty you can feel pretty sure he's not too good for anything that happens to him."

VIII

AFTER-DINNER SENTIMENT

Clearly, thought John with some bitterness, he had formed a habit of receiving revelations. Here, at any rate, was another one. Reeling under Payne's brutal exposition of the common attitude towards the criminal, and startled by his uncle's attitude of concession towards society, he had no chance to conform with it in spirit, as a necessary result of social conditions, before he was struck with the words of Gwynne. More than they had to do with his own ethical standing in the just then imminent world of fact, they amazed him, characteristically enough, in their relation to the confession of the miserable Elridge. Was it possible that a man who could so bear himself under cross-examination upon the fellow's flight was really the runaway's partner? And, above all, was it possible that a man who could conclude such

a conversation with so sweeping a statement seemingly so sincerely uttered, could be himself a criminal?

Haig was not the sort to bear in the presence of their subject the strain of such considerations. He was glad to find any relief from them; he was delighted to find that relief in Phyllis. He could forget it all the moment he met her smile, could forget the very relation in which she stood to his robber-chief, and could grasp with innate social skill the chance that led Payne to another end of the drawing-room, there to offer the customary civilities to the placid little Mrs. Gwynne and the beaming and stout Mrs. Osgood, already attended by the bishop and his remaining guest.

Yet, as he showed the way to a conveniently sequestered window-seat, he was more serious in tone than the apparently trifling occasion warranted or Phyllis could well account for. The girl, however, was as receptive as most girls of her class, and even more than commonly adaptive, so that she quickly and easily caught his mood.

She was dressed in white, with an entrancingly abortive suggestion of the fashionable cut to the corsage and, as he drew back the curtains, she raised, to brush a random curl from her slim, unadorned neck, a girlish arm of pure and graceful proportions.

"So you were pleased with your picture?" he asked almost funereally.

"In the paper? Indeed I was! The Globe-Express made most of the girls look rather horrid a month ago, but this one quite flattered me."

He sat down beside her on the narrow cushions. He had to sit close, and, in order to lean forward, he must even place on the window-sill an arm in tantalizing proximity to her lithe white shoulders.

"I'm glad you liked it," he said. "And now, I suppose, you'll be asking when it's to be returned."

She looked up smiling.

"I haven't—yet."

He drew still closer.

"Then you don't—I mean, I mustn't send it?"

"You might bring it."

"I should like the mission, but not its motive."

"But the photograph belongs to Bishop Osgood, you know."

"I am one of his family just now, and I will see that it is delivered to this house and remains under his roof. Isn't that enough to promise?"

They were both smiling now, but, for all that, none the less serious in their play.

"You don't seem to think," she pouted, "that he wants it!"

"He can't help wanting," Haig returned; "but I know some one who wants it more."

She tried vainly to laugh away his meaning.

"It does seem," she admitted, "after your courage in coming to me for it, and the diplomatic way you got it, and—and all the nice things you've said about it since, that you deserve some reward."

"Oh, I don't claim to have deserved anything!"

"Isn't merely doing one's duty enough to deserve some recognition?"

He took the words for what, with the shock of a return, they then meant to him.

"I have wondered about that," he said, "about that question of duty a good deal lately. It's all very well for people to talk about the beauty of doing one's duty, but the real beauty isn't in the doing, it's in the ability to decide on what one's duty is. Once you've decided it's all plain sailing, only the world is all such a tangle that whenever there arises the necessity of what we call performing a duty there are always presented to us two or three possible courses, all leading in different directions, yet any one of which might be interpreted as the dutiful one at the expense of all the others."

He spoke with so much feeling that she looked up wondering. Moral questions had always seemed very simple to her, because she had never been called upon consciously to answer any.

"But," she asked, with grave naïveté,

"it's always your duty to do the thing that is right, isn't it?"

Haig smiled indulgently, but lost nothing of his seriousness of tone.

"That's only another way of putting the question," he forbearingly explained. "What's right at one time isn't always at another, and several very different things may be right at the same time just as you happen to look at them."

"Well, I think there's always one that must be the right one for each person."

"If we can only find it, yes. But here's a case in point: Suppose that I'd been sent by my paper to your house the other night to get your photograph for something you wouldn't have liked to have it used for—would it have been my duty to get it?"

"If you could," she laughed. "I suppose if it was something that they had no right to have it for, you wouldn't be bound to get it. But then, you see," she concluded with woman-like practicality, "it wasn't."

John looked at her admiringly. His own hatred of ethical hair-splitting instantly re-

joiced in this downright rejection of his quibbles, and his whole æsthetic and masculine sense grew suddenly glad in the sight of her splendid womanhood—in just her.

He suited his words to the tune, ready enough, however, for unpracticality of another sort.

"Do you know," he said, "that you are the first girl I met in all this city?"

She raised her delicate brows.

"And do you know," he pressed the point, "that you are as yet the only one?"

"What, in all this time?"

"In this age of a week or more."

"Ah! but you'll soon remedy that," she said with the instinctive feminine miserliness.—These women understand one another!

"I shouldn't want to spoil it," he declared.

She laughed. She was already used to pleasant words, but there was that quality, she was dimly, almost sweetly aware, to his earnestness which was winning her.

"A reporter, you see," he proceeded with

all the wisdom of the new man, "is a lonely sort of a fellow, so that I don't know that I could remedy it soon even if I wanted to—and I don't. It's work until all hours in all sorts of unlikely places, and hard work, too. He hasn't a chance to meet many nice people, so that those he does know mean a great deal to him—a very great deal."

The heavy curtain threw a grateful shade about them, but above them hung suspended from a dark grill-work a grotesque Oriental lamp that cast a soft red glow over her face and tinted her neck and shoulders as the sunlight, he remembered from his far-off boyhood, tints the undulating crests of snow-clad hills at dawn. Out of the shadow of her hair her eyes glowed.

The rest of the party were sitting with backs forgetfully turned beyond still other shadows, beyond the low sound of his voice. He seemed very much alone with her, so much alone that all his doubts and struggles of an hour earlier belonged to a different life, were quite forgotten. Irrelevantly he remarked the sensation.

"Far away?" she repeated, adopting, however, much of the hush that was on his own voice. "Only the length of the room."

"A thousand miles," he declared.

His words meant much, and she knew it. There was a little pause in which he took from her lap her fan that was fastened to her girdle by a thin short chain of pearls. The contact was personal, intimate. He opened the silken thing gently, reverently, and with a hand that trembled.

"A room's length or the world's length," he finally pursued, with eyes fastened on the fan, with deep, low voice that shook; "either may be the other—as you wish it."

He looked up at her slowly.

Her lips moved mechanically; her dreamy gaze was towards the rest of the party, out wistfully past them, past the room, past all things material. It was fixed, he suddenly knew, upon her girlhood.

"As we wish it," she whispered, and as she spoke she had conquered, for the moment, time and fate. She was the girl of that

earlier picture he had first seen and loved at her home. He felt now that he had loved it all along. He did not know why; he knew only that he loved it.

"I shall send you the photograph to-morrow," he said.

She thought that she had offended him, and the thought hurt her. Their eyes met. There was a tenderness in his that she mistook for the throbbing symbol of his wound; for a moment she struggled between pride and pain, and, as she looked, pain conquered.

"Then you don't want it?" she asked.

He closed her fan and returned it to its place. The touch of her dress thrilled his voice.

"I want more than that," he began. Then, violently, he pulled himself together. "I want," he went on, "that other picture—that first one, please—if I may."

She understood now far better than did he, and, although even she could not have said why, her hazel eyes filled. But she smiled bravely, and, facing things as they

were, made a single generous concession as she rose to join the others.

"You may have it," she said, "upon one condition."

He stood reluctantly beside her.

"And that?" he wondered.

"Is that you don't, as I have already said, send——"

"But come?" he interrupted.

"Empty-handed," she concluded, "at three o'clock."

But he was as jubilantly intent upon the letter as the spirit.

"Then I am to have both?"

She nodded across the room, and his eyes followed her meaning. Under that imperious inclination and from their little corner in fairyland, the good bishop, the volatile Payne, Gwynne, his pellucid wife, and the expansive Mrs. Osgood seemed indeed but a very stupid party.

"Have them?" said Phyllis. "Why not? With all my admiration for your uncle and his wife, haven't you saved me," she waved a little bejewelled hand of explanation,

and added, "from that? And now," she concluded, "guide me back across all these terrible thousand miles."

"From the garden of Hesperides," said John.

She guessed at the reference and smiled, but Haig still lingered.

"It is a thousand miles, then?" he persisted.

"The very world's end," she laughed.

She had sternly resolved against all folly, but in the very instant of her triumph she mutely suffered a spiritual surrender. For, to make assurance doubly sure, she herself raised a firm arm to push aside a bit of the curtain that might be made to serve a further impediment to their departure. In so doing her hand touched his, bent upon a similar errand, and though the next moment she was hurrying, almost fleeing to her father, there had flashed, nevertheless, from one to the other that message which, thus conveyed, is the ultimate confidence.

IX

THE USE OF A DAUGHTER

It was characteristic of him as a man who disliked all forms of mental acrobatics that, once this sort of thing had been forced upon him, Haig, until circumstances had rung down the curtain upon the close of the episode, could not lastingly rid himself of his part in the performance. He found, then, at once, that the few minutes of ease which he had enjoyed with Phyllis were only an *entre-act*, and no sooner had he left her than the whole thing began over again.

What was the meaning of this fearsome riddle of right and wrong? All men, Jimmie Ricker upon the one hand and Marsden Payne upon the other, seemed to regard the evil as lying not in the crime, but in its detection. He realized that things had gone too far for him to turn for help even to the

bishop, for the bishop had plainly displayed alarming symptoms of concession to the apparently accepted view. He saw, too, that all men must finally fight these battles alone; that in the dark deeps of their own souls they must control the tremendous springs of action. But what he could not see was that he was entering upon the struggle more than commonly handicapped by convention; that where others had the experience of half a life to guide them in their choice, he had an experience of only a day for their every year. The claw of fate had fixed upon him early; ten years of prison had wiped out every helpful memory of the actual world, and had left him, timid and ingenuous, with his feet fixed upon tottering ideals false to established fact, born afresh into life at the age meant for maturity.

One lesson, however, he had learned from his brief period of ease, the lesson of the sufferer relieved by the hypodermic needle. He turned to Phyllis as some mutilated wretch to morphine. And he found his solace as secure.

The day following that of the dinner he managed easily to find time from a stupid assignment to call upon her at the very instant of appointment, and he was rejoiced to find that she had set an hour when they were relatively sure to be undisturbed. The girl's manner was forcibly that of delight. Speedily exhausting common acquaintances, they were forced to talk of only safest generalities. But it was none the less evident that they both enjoyed the interview which for one, in both bringing peace and securing a return, well served the double purpose of an opiate.

In most respects a harmless one enough, the analogy still held in the after-effects, for from his second draught John awoke to the torment consequent upon the moral attitude in which he stood to the girl's father. When he was with her he forgot her nearest kin along with all the rest of the world, but the moment she was out of his sight he was tormented by all the seven devils of doubt and remorse. From this there was but the single escape of another glimpse of her, and that

they both managed so well that, in spite of Phyllis's already multitudinous engagements, not a day passed but they somehow met.

For some days the girl held him at arms' length, this strange new sort of a man, who, she always dreaded, was about to forsake the general for the personal. Yet daily she came, as even he could see, more and more to wish not to keep him from her. Then, after an afternoon's automobiling through the city park, he awoke to the knowledge that it was Wednesday evening; that the two weeks of Elridge's, of his own, of Gwynne's grace, would be up on Friday, and that on the morrow his city editor, and even Mr. Thring, would demand the confession for publication in Saturday's paper.

Though to the new reporter there had, of course, seemed nothing amiss, he had been, for the past two weeks or more, keenly aware that his position at the office was most anomalous. Fealy passed him in the halls without speaking, and continued to give him the most trying hack-work assignments. Once Mr.

Thring in going through Haig's room by a tortuous course to his own, had so far recovered from his star-gazing to touch him on the arm and inquire smilingly about his work, and that, John knew, was a tacit assurance that there was one man on the paper who could and did stand between him and dismissal. But save for that incident his way was dark.

And now the critical moment was about to arrive. Fealy had said no word to him all that day, yet the fact was terribly plain. He left the office on the stroke of midnight and, omitting his accustomed solitary glass of beer, denied himself his car in an appeal to hard walking and the keen night air.

In an instant he was again plunged into an ocean of uncertainty. For the thousandth time he asked himself his duty. He had read that all things were subservient to love; that honour sacrificed upon love's altar meant a finer honour gained. He might even yet burn that incriminating paper, seek other employment, and win his heart's desire. But he was not yet the man to be deceived by such trans-

parent sophistry. He was still too new to the world to accept the world's logic.

He had walked far past his home. All about him the city was quiet, the streets were desolate. Only his hurried, aimless footsteps woke clattering echoes among the blind houses which sprang up at either hand. Yet out of the night there rose at last one that kept him reluctant company, that clung to his coat and held him back. Phyllis, in dumb appeal, hung about his knees. He would not look. Her hands rose to his arms; he dragged her girlhood along in the dust after him. Her hands were slipping to his—never! They touched his; they held him. It was the touch that he had encountered at the curtain.

With a groan he wheeled about. He knew what he was doing, knew all that it meant. He would lose Phyllis—there was a painful satisfaction in the realization of that stroke of reluctive justice—yet he would make this one concession to his conscience; he would go next morning to Bill Gwynne's office and warn him. In the relief of emerging at last from his struggles with the strange current

of doubt to his familiar firm earth of certainty, calm in his inevitable sense of security in arriving at a definite conclusion of whatever sort, he went to bed and slept soundly until nine o'clock.

Two hours later he was being shown into a large, well-furnished, well-lighted room on the second floor of a great office-building, into the cheerful holy of holies of Billy Gwynne.

As Haig advanced over the deep soft rugs, the politician, in immaculate frock coat, rose from a roll-top, ordered desk beside a window that looked out on the city's busiest thoroughfare, and advanced with outstretched hands and red face which concealed every trace of surprise beneath a well-assumed mask of conventional pleasure.

John did not shake hands, but Gwynne was tactician enough so to let his own arm fall that any observer, had there been one, must have failed to note the little awkwardness.

"I dare say you don't remember me——" began Haig.

"Perfectly, my dear sir, perfectly,"

Gwynne pleasantly assured him. "You're the good bishop's nephew, Mr. Haig. Sit down."

John took a chair near the arm of the desk, and Gwynne resumed his former place.

"I suppose," the latter continued, "that you are here on business of the paper. How are things going on down there? How's Fealy and Thring, and how's little Jimmy Ricker? They're all friends of mine on the Globe-Express. I don't like to recall favours, but you may remember that I helped a little in getting you there."

But, once there was a pressing need for action, Haig was not the man thus easily to be brushed aside. Gwynne's influence in securing his position had not been forgotten in his recent worries, and he now cheerfully admitted it. Yet—

"It's only partly on newspaper business that I'm here," he added. "I don't really know that you can call it newspaper business at all. I'm sorry to hear that you think Fealy's a friend of yours, for I've come to tell you just the other thing." He looked

over his shoulder at the distant entrance of the room, and concluded with the question: "We're not likely to be overheard?"

Gwynne's heavy eyebrows contracted to a sudden keenness. He pushed a button in his desk, and the burly clerk who had shown Haig in now appeared as if by magic at the doorway.

"I don't want to be disturbed, Barton," the politician calmly explained, "until I push the buzzer again."

The clerk disappeared as quickly as he had come, and Gwynne pursued:

"Now, Mr. Haig, you can go ahead."

John went ahead.

"I don't want you to ask my reasons for telling you what I'm going to tell you," he said, speaking faintly and clearly, but rapidly. "I know what it is. It's a dirty trick I'm playing my paper, and it is not the square thing morally, but I'm doing it—for reasons of my own. Two weeks ago we got the tip there was a warrant out on the quiet for the contractor Elridge. He was going to skip, and I was the only one to get him for

an interview before he ran away. I got him. I promised him two weeks' grace if he'd give me a confession, and he gave it—wrote it out. They wanted to see it at the office, but I knew Fealy'd use it right away if I gave it up, so I kept it to myself. No one's had a sight of it yet but me, but it's got to go into to-morrow's paper. It's detailed, and in a way that I don't think anybody can mistake it implicates you."

X

A MODERN BANQUO'S GHOST

Billy Gwynne bent forward, slowly drew from his pocket a case of cigars, and presented it to the reporter. Haig waved it nervously aside, and Gwynne, with a murmur of apology, carefully selected and lit a mild Manila. Then he leaned back again, comfortably crossed his legs, and through a fragrant cloud of blue smoke gazed at the young man with an air of puzzled amusement.

"Mr. Haig," he at last said, "you are a very young man."

John's jaw dropped.

"A very young man," continued Gwynne musingly. "And what is more, you are not very promising at newspaper work. Here you have been in this town for about three weeks—isn't it?—and yet you come to me with a story like this."

Haig was plunged forthwith into a sea of confusion. Was it, after all, possible that he had made some great mistake? He did not pause to consider the question. There was something that irritated him on the surface, and that is what always demands of us the more instant attention.

"I don't see," he stiffly rejoined, "what my age or business ability has to do with the matter in hand."

Gwynne grew more serious. He withdrew his cigar and, snapping forward in his chair, shook a heavy forefinger at his *vis-à-vis*.

"It's got," he said, "just this to do with it: Any one with any perception of the sort needed in your work would have known better than to act the way you've done. Great Lord, man! Don't you see how it is? Your people, you say, haven't seen this confession, as you call it. They haven't an idea whom it implicates. You've risked your job by refusing to give them any. Well, do you suppose that if they had an idea, or if I'd an idea

that they'd had one, there'd be a single paper in this whole city would dare to print such stuff about me? Why, man alive, don't you know that they're all, or nearly all, on my side?"

The blow caught Haig squarely. It threw him to his feet. He grasped spasmodically at the arm of the desk.

"But," he cried, "it's true!"

Billy Gwynne raised his bushy eyebrows until they were lost in the meeting with his hair. He smiled. He said nothing; he only smiled. But that smile explained the whole situation.

John Haig's little idealization of a moral humanity crumbled beneath his feet, and he sank back into his chair with a sad, small gasp.

Meanwhile, Gwynne was narrowly studying the white, clean-cut face before him. Had he been a man of different experience he might not have formed the erroneous judgment which now resulted from this scrutiny, but he was not in the habit of coming into such contact with what he would have stig-

matized as sheer Quixotism, and he acted at once accordingly.

"But don't let this worry you, Mr. Haig," he encouragingly began. "You may not be suited to newspaper work, but there seems to be another sort of work to which, as I might have known, you're suited pretty well. Your real faults are youth and greenness, and those you'll get over all in good time. You've done what might have been a confoundedly clever thing—only it wasn't. Now, I'm not offended. Don't think that I'm offended in the least. I've found that it doesn't pay to get offended in this life. So I'm going to make a proposition to you. I'll admit, between us two here, that that confession, to give it your own name for it, is worth something to me, even if you can't use it. You see, I'm perfectly fair—fairer than you were. I tell you that you've not got the weapon that you thought you had, but I admit that it's a weapon of some kind, and one that I'd rather have my own fingers on. That's why I'm going to ask you your price."

John was still in a confused and storm-

tossed condition, but he was not of the men whom the emotion of surprise can affect to the point of dulness. There was therefore real indignation in his voice as he rapped out:

"My price?"

Once more Gwynne smiled indulgently. He had, he thought, met with this kind too often before to be deceived by a greenhorn.

"Exactly," he calmly responded. "Now, don't let us waste time, Mr. Haig. I have several more important things to do this morning. We'll suppose, for the sake of argument, that you've said all that a man ought to say to such an offer, and so we'll get down to business. How much do you want for handing over that confession to me?"

"I am not in the habit of selling myself, nor of having other people bid for me."

There was a ring about the statement that forced Gwynne upon another and safer road.

"Why, I don't suppose that you are, Mr. Haig. You don't look it. I know, of course, that you're a gentleman, and I dare say that I needn't remind you that I am one, too. I would hardly, then, offer you such an insult

as you seem to have supposed. I beg pardon for speaking in a manner that you could misinterpret. That's square, isn't it?"

"Well, then," asked Haig, only half-mollified, "what are you trying to get at?"

"Life is life, Mr. Haig. We've got to help each other or none of us would ever get along in this world. Of course, I'm in a position to help you, for your job won't be worth a week's notice just as soon as that pleasant city editor of yours gets a chance to fire you. Well, you're in a way of doing me a favour, too. Why shouldn't we make a fair trade? That's all I want. You don't seem to know much about my position in this city——"

"I know it pretty well, thank you."

"Then I'm relieved from boring you with details. If you understand my position, you'll know that I can fix things up here for about what I want and about what you want. But I could take that paper out of your pocket, I suppose, and you wouldn't have much of a chance of proving a word of it in the courts. Instead of that, I've met you at the house of a very dear friend of mine, a great and good

man, Mr. Haig. I see that you're a young fellow with brains and ability to get on. That's the kind of man this city wants. We need them, for the public good, in our offices."

John picked up his hat from the floor and rose to leave. He spoke quietly.

"You may go to the devil, Mr. Gwynne," he said.

"I wouldn't, if I were you, take this pose, Mr. Haig; I really wouldn't."

"Good-morning," said John.

"Mr. Haig!"

Gwynne had risen to his feet. His tone was sharp, but not one whit excited. Something in it made John turn.

"Well?" he asked.

The politician was standing upright, his face redder than Haig had yet seen it, but, to all other appearances, he was perfectly composed.

"I don't want you to misunderstand your position in this matter," he said gravely. "Believe me, I was sincere in all that I said. But I'm really beginning to think that you were sincere, too. You were, weren't you?"

"I certainly was."

"Huh! Well, you've told me not to ask you why you took this step, and if it wasn't for the reasons I naturally supposed, then I can't see what the devil it was for. However, it evidently was for something else, so I won't press you."

"It wouldn't matter if you did."

"I'm beginning to think it wouldn't—and there I'm paying you a compliment, even if you don't know it. Now, Mr. Haig"—he coughed gently and relit his cigar—"I want you to see how things are before you run away and do anything rash. I'm not going to make you any further offers—those I have made stand for the present, but you don't seem to like them, so I'm not going to make any more. But there's something I'd have you know." His eyes lit up with sudden feeling, and he brought his fist down solidly upon the desk. "You've got to understand this: you can't hurt me, whatever you do, for the simple reason that my oath is a great deal better than yours."

Haig was unable to bear quietly another word. The calm insolence of the man, his assurance and, above all, the sense that his attitude was more or less justified by fact, stung John with every syllable that was uttered. His conceptions of right and wrong had been receiving silently, during the past few days, wound after wound. But this was too much. He had had no previous idea of making public the confession through other channels than the columns of his own paper; in another mood he might even have welcomed the closing of those columns against the article as a righteous escape from his moral difficulty; but Gwynne's offers of a bribe had driven out of his mind all considerations save those of this insult. He turned upon the politician savagely.

"How can that be?" he cried. "You have position here, I know, and you seem to have all sorts of power, but I guess I can soon enough prove to you that in this country one man's word's as good as another's, Mr. Gwynne!"

Gwynne was also fast losing his temper.

As he had intimated, he did not often grow angry, because he thoroughly understood most of the men with whom he had to deal, but he always lost his temper when he had to do with a man whose motives were beyond the political intelligence. For the present he nevertheless spoke with his habitual placidity.

"Is it?" he asked. "Is my word no better than that of a branded jail-bird?"

Haig recoiled. His pallor deepened; his nerveless fingers let his hat fall with a queer thud to the floor. He noticed, as his eyes aimlessly followed its curving course, that it rolled back upon the rug on which he was standing, and he observed that the rug was red. Then the full meaning of the man's words rushed upon him and he faced about.

"You're a coward," he said. "You're a coward, and you're trying to hide behind a few dirty words. How do you know anything about me, and what does it matter what you know?"

"How do I know it? I thought you seemed pretty well to have forgotten that you owed

me your bread and butter. Why, your uncle told me all about you, of course, when he got me to get you on the paper."

"My uncle?" gasped John.

"Certainly. You don't suppose he's the dishonest sort of man who would ask me to recommend a fellow without telling me all about the chap? Oh, I know all there is to know about you, Mr. Haig, and I must say you're mighty thankful for my keeping quiet!"

But from this palpable bid for gratitude Haig turned promptly.

"I guess I squared myself with you by coming here at all this morning," he replied. "If my uncle did tell you this about me—and I can begin to see now how he would—then I may as well add this: that I'm not ashamed of myself, and that if I didn't let any one know about my—what has happened to me, it was because it wasn't any one's business."

"I don't think the office will agree with you there. I never heard of such absurd foolery! Not your employers' business that you've been in jail?"

"That's what I say. If I'd broken jail it might have been a different thing—it would have been different. But haven't I done all that the law requires of me? Well, then, I'm as good in the eyes of the law as anybody else. And that's not all. I tell you, Mr. Gwynne—and I mean what I say—that if I'm at all right you're all wrong, for if my paper's employing a thief that's been caught and served his term and come out clean, your precious city's employing a thief that hasn't been caught, and that's keeping on robbing it!"

Gwynne broke into a laugh of genuine surprise. He was beginning at last to understand this young fellow. It seemed too good to be true, but he was sincerely amused with the chance of the novelty.

"Upon my soul," he said, "I really think you consider yourself more socially eligible than I am."

Haig leaned upon a chair-back.

"I don't consider," he replied, "that there's any comparison."

He watched the face of the politician closely, and of what he now saw taking place

there he could have no doubt. It was the routing of a surprised uncertainty by the honest acceptance of an astounding fact.

"Why, God bless my soul," said Gwynne at last, "you've been in jail!"

XI

EXIT A REPORTER

Haig left the office without a word—so quickly, in fact, that he was gone before Gwynne could recover from his surprise. He got into the street. He wanted to mix with the crowd, to lose himself among these myriad lives and forget, if possible, this thing which he had heard.

But he could not forget it. It lurked at every corner, it fell from every lip that gave to his ear fragmentary words as he passed hurriedly by. It kept dinning in his head with every step he took, until he was forced to meet and consider it.

At first it was of only the injustice of the code that he was sensible. So this, at last, was the prevailing view! What, then, was punishment if it was not reparation? Men had drawn upon the whole experience of

their race to enact and exact either the justest or the severest penalties, and then, when the penalties were paid, usurious society screamed for more. Was it blood-mad, this earth of men? What, else, was the logic on which it builded? The overt crime of it, to tell him in so many words, here, there, everywhere, that his shame was not that he had done wrong, not even that he had been detected in the doing of it, but that he had committed the enormity of paying the price.

He reflected with a terrible bitterness that had he chosen the easier course, as it had been for him to choose, he could have made only a material restitution to those whom he had wronged; could have avoided the law, and, removing from the scene of his downfall, have remained, to all appearances, the man that most men were. And he would have done so had it not been for the magniloquent advice of a parson who had nothing himself to lose, would have saved, as the Chinese have it, his face—and that, it seemed, was the important thing—would

have rescued not only ten years, not only the half of splendid youth, but his whole long life.

At first he could have cursed the bishop for his blindness and his false counsel, but soon he was far more inclined to pity him. For the bishop was a man of conscience, and he, too, must shortly awaken to the consequences of his advice; must, sooner or later, bow his neck to the social yoke. Nay, Haig's memory, quickened by his new knowledge, reviewed the past several days, and asked sharply whether his uncle had not, so long ago as the evening of the return, already awakened. With vivid distinctness and with new meaning it recalled the good man's attitude in the discussion following his little dinner-party; it seized upon and ticketed a multitude of casual words and unconsidered expressions, at first but half-noted during the past three weeks, and all of these it finally capped with the triumphant fact of what his uncle had told to Gwynne. No, here was indeed an idol fallen, an idol that had stood so high and tumbled so low that its inevitable

overthrow could rouse no emotion save that of pity.

Inevitable indeed. For Gwynne was representative. Upon that—as upon all that logically followed—there could no longer be any uncertainty. There came back to Haig even a corroborative recollection from his earliest childhood—a picture that had hitherto lain all these forgetful years in some dusty attic, some Genevra-chest of his brain—the memory of a pale-faced, stooping figure he had once seen skulking along a back lane of his village, and from whom his pinafored companions had unsteadily fled in terror because, they said, the thing had been in jail.

He caught a glimpse of his own face reflected, among a dozen others, in a store-window, and his resentment gave way to terror as he remarked that it was the very face of that lost village lane.

He rushed he knew not where—anywhere so long as it was out and away from the business portion and into the least-frequented streets of the city. He would have fled, if he could, to the untrodden wilderness. For he

was afraid. He was no longer a man among men; he was an outcast—he had been in jail. What though the world loathed him only because he had obeyed the world? It did loathe him; worst of all, it must. He was an outcast, he repeated; the tokens of his shame were plain upon him, and he was suddenly, and for the first time in his life, ashamed to show his face to strangers.

The terror of the mood lasted for hours. Its underlying principle was destined never wholly to pass away. But at last its intensity temporarily exhausted itself by very superaction, and habit, so speedily acquired and so strong to sway, prompted him to look at his watch.

It was three o'clock; he had been due at the office at one, and he was miles away.

He took a car, but there was a block on the line, and it was half-past four when he arrived. He was not now, however, so much worried about his tardiness as he was curious to discover what Fealy would have to say when he read the Elridge confession. He was at the last too tired, both of body and

mind, to think of affairs more important, and he entered the city editor's room almost jauntily.

Fealy was there. He was clearly waiting; clearly, too, he had been waiting for some time, and was neither used to nor fond of the pastime.

"You're half a day late, Mr. Haig," he growled.

John noticed that the perpetual cigar was more than commonly gnawed.

"I'm sorry, sir," he replied. "I'll see that it doesn't happen again."

"Well, let's have your precious paper."

Haig produced it from his breast-pocket. Fealy snatched it like a bird of prey, and then, to the reporter's unconcealed astonishment and dismay, thrust it into his own coat.

"Why, don't you want to read it over?" asked John.

"I don't imagine we'll have much use for it. It's turned out to be a fake, Mr. Haig, and if you'd have been honest about it you'd have saved the paper a good deal of trouble and yourself a sight more."

The situation began to grow clear to John, but he was too worn out to care much. He had completed the performance of his duty to his employers. It had ceased to be a painful and had become a doubtful duty, but he was unable long to consider it one way or the other.

"Have you my assignment ready?" he asked.

Fealy must have expected some protest, and had his wrath prepared. The protest not being forthcoming, he was all the more sincere in his anger.

"Assignment?" he fairly roared. "You're impudent one week, make fools of us all the next, and then have the nerve to come here at 4.30 in the afternoon"—it was a quarter after by the clock, but that was a detail—"and ask me if I've got your assignment! No, Mr. Haig, I haven't got your assignment and I never will have."

John's lips tightened.

"Do you mean," he asked, "that you've discharged me?"

"I certainly do. I can't have men coming in to work at all hours."

"Very well, Mr. Fealy, only let's understand one another. I know, of course, that the reason you're getting rid of me is in your pocket——"

"Get out of here!"

"And I consider that you have stolen it."

"Stolen it! Well, I know what you are, and I don't want you around this place!"

Haig withdrew with what trace of dignity was left him by the shock of his new view of life. That shock had spared him just sufficient reserve force to maintain some appearance of dignity before the snarling beast in the city editor's office, but there it ceased, and a strange thing appeared in its stead. John knew that he could not defend his position before Mr. Thring; he realized far too fully the immense force against him, yet there was left an odd desire for what justice the world allowed—the justice of his two weeks' notice. He was suffering so much from the moral code that he wanted whatever of base balm it might contain, and he re-

solved to beg—since he could not fight—for that. He accordingly conceived and at once executed a plan that would have been impossible to him twelve hours before. It meant that his pride was, for the time, at least, completely stunned.

Mr. Thring was writing an editorial with a crayon pencil in a den very like to and not much better than Fealy's. He looked up, as Haig entered, with vague surprise.

John stated his case briefly and succinctly, but with a note in his voice that sounded like a whine, a note which, try as he would, he could not then eradicate.

When he had ceased Mr. Thring, who had not looked up again during the whole recital, continued silent for a moment, making dots with his pencil on a sheet of pulpy copy-paper. At last he said:

"Why didn't you say this to Mr. Fealy?"

"He didn't give me the chance."

"Well," continued the editor rather querulously, "he's the man you ought to say it to."

There was another pause. Thring hated

scenes, but, seeing at last that the thing had to be done, he spoke as kindly as possible.

"It seems that you ought to have the two weeks' notice, though of course there's no contract, nothing that the law would recognise. But that's Fealy's business, and he's discharged you right off. I can't meddle with his department, you know. However"—he paused and wrote a few unintelligible lines on a scrap of note-paper which he handed to John—"I guess I can do this. There's an order on the business-office for this week's pay and the two weeks following."

He was not used to speaking so much. It annoyed and embarrassed him. Besides, he knew that worse must shortly be demanded of him.

And it was.

"But then I've the right to earn this," John still had managed to protest.

Still Thring did not look up. He could not now had he wished to. As it was he thanked Heaven that he could not, and replied:

"Not under the law. The truth is, Mr.

Haig, I—I think you ought to be satisfied with this. I can't argue the point, but, you see, it appears there are things in your past life—— And you know a paper of our standing can't afford to employ—— I'm very sorry, and I'm really surprised that such a man as Bishop Osgood——"

But before he was further lost in the maze of his emotions he learned from the corner of his eye that the reporter—now a reporter no more—had shrunk from the room, and he was enabled to settle back, with a sigh of relief, to his editorial.

XII

THE BETTER PART OF VALOUR

THE next thing of which John was distinctly conscious was the realization of being in his uncle's study, and of having, impulsively, somewhat helplessly, laid the whole case before the churchman. It was a meaning thing that, whereas he had once considered it an honour to come to this source for counsel and assistance, he now, in so far as he was capable of experiencing any subsidiary emotion, confessed it at the outset as an appeal spiritually hopeless and materially degrading.

The bishop, on his part, was much distressed and more disturbed. First of all, however, he refused, of course, to believe that the confession could have been sincere if it inculpated so exemplary a Christian as Mr. Gwynne. From this sentiment John was

too weary to dissent, but there were conclusions far more pressing to combat, and with these he was, at first confusedly, forced to deal. For Bishop Osgood was keenly aware of his responsibility. He had for some time, as Haig had surmised, observed its approach; he had even come to regard it as logical, if not, indeed, as inevitable; yet now that it was here he was none the more ready to treat with it.

He admitted and defended his revelation to Gwynne. As he had at that time regarded the affair—and he said this in a tone which covertly implied that he now regarded it far differently—he could not, he pointed out, conscientiously, have asked a recommendation under false colours. If Gwynne had withheld the full knowledge from John's employers, that was Gwynne's fault, not the bishop's, and had been committed, the latter was sure, out of sheer, though mistaken, kindness of heart. It was, moreover, proof positive of the politician's innocence in the final detection.

All this and more, though he considered

it sophistry, Haig let dumbly pass. The mere fact of not having at first to talk rested him, and as he rested, something of strength gradually returned. Listening to the bishop's words he found that he had half-expected them. He did not, just then, care. He knew that the present most important point must at last be reached, and at last it was.

"Of course," began the bishop, with some degree of hesitation, not to say reluctance, "all this is most unfortunate, yet I can't see that it arose from any but the best intentions on the part of all concerned, excepting, of course, Mr.—— what's his name, your city editor?—who is naturally unspeakable. So" —he tried bravely to smile—"we must just make the best of it and begin all over again. Life, you will find, is mostly made up of beginnings-over; here am I at my age, for instance— Now, we can't, just at present, be choosers. You've—you've had some experience in banking. Well, I know very intimately Mr. Parton. He is at the head of one of the largest banks

in this city, and I'll see if I can't get you with him."

It is a cynical sign-post indicative of how little we are advanced upon the last stage of evolution, a significant indication of how strong is yet our brute inheritance, that the lower emotions are in most men still, at the time of test, the strongest. A month earlier the bishop would never have made his now easy proposition; a day earlier John Haig would never have made the reply which at this instant sprang ready to his lips. The one rag of his old garment which then seemed to remain clinging to him was the conviction that he could not depend for at least his direct support upon such a man as Bishop Osgood here proved himself to be; that he must earn, somehow, his own bread and butter. Yet, rightly or wrongly, he was an outcast, and, rightly or wrongly, he must hide the mark. He hung his head, but spoke with calculation:

"A bank?" he repeated. "Why, you know they wouldn't take me there."

"I am coming to that. I was certainly

right in telling Mr. Gwynne everything, as you, I took it for granted, were aware of my course and would, at any rate, certainly have agreed in it. But we both—we both seem to have held a—a bit too high an opinion of the world. People seem to look at these things very differently from the way we supposed they should—from the way we looked at them. I, who have lived so long among men, should have known it. Indeed, they are so strenuous about it that I admit you've cause for complaint against my ignorance as quite unjustifiable. But I've all my life been contented to keep myself shut up in what appears to have been a world of my own devising, and, as I've intimated, I'm only just beginning to see how wrong I was in such blind action. I was so much a man apart that I thought my world was that of right. Oh, this incident has taught me a bitter lesson! I can see now that I was all the while committing by my very attitude a sin of pride to think—if I considered it at all—that the vast majority of minds, quite as good as mine, hadn't, after all these generations, arrived

at a clearer view. I've so kept myself to myself alone that I'm as yet unfitted intelligently to follow their reasoning, but I can at least submit to it now that I see clearly my former false position. The great prevailing standards against all sin must be in some way the more or less direct expression of the divine will. 'Vox populi—' you understand. Yet, in your case, I know so well that you're all right, and that you're an exception, that it wouldn't be necessary, it wouldn't even be right, to make a clean breast of them—that, in short, I'll—I'll not mention the past to Mr. Parton. You see how perfectly I trust you."

Whatever were the other five parts of this somewhat wandering and otherwise unclassical oration, the conclusion, at any rate, was weak. Yet, though John saw that, he saw also that his uncle felt it just as keenly, and so, partly from pity, and partly from more selfish sentiments, reached by the appeal of the *conquestio*, he accepted its offer with unfeigned gratitude and, as some further reply was required to bridge the embarrassing chasm of moral surrender, he devoted what

energy he had gathered together towards differing, here and there, with the bishop upon the side issues.

"I think," he none the less ingenuously submitted, "that you go a little too far in your acceptance of the verdict of the crowd. I admit that we went too far the one way heretofore, but now, it seems to me, we're in danger of going a little too far in the other direction. There is certainly something wrong with the obtaining attitude. It may not be for us to right it, or even to say where it is, but there's something wrong somewhere. To begin with the prisoners themselves, you can't tell what sort of men they are by the way they behave in jail, and so you haven't any way to judge whether or no they'll be dangerous when they get out. The habitual criminals are the best prisoners, and the worst criminals are often the most religious."

"Where we were fundamentally wrong," replied the bishop, "was in our conception of the law. It's true that the law is just the codified logic of ethics, and so has a sanction. But it is also simply an expression of popu-

lar opinion. It is public opinion that makes ethics, and ethics make the laws. But laws are not the expression of the whole of public opinion, and what remains unexpressed is the great body of the unwritten law which we failed utterly to take into account."

"But then the law ought to be the complete expression."

"So should all men be perfect. They will be some day, but we haven't developed that far yet. The race, and with it, of course, the law, is progressing towards perfection, and that is the best we have at present a right to ask of it. Such as it now is, it pretty generally appeals to our logical conscience—and conscience comes from God."

"But all men, wherever it comes from, haven't the same highly trained conscience."

"Then, as we must all make for righteousness, the most conscientious must make the less conscientious obey through fear of punishment."

"Why, that's the old *lex talionis!*"

"Certainly. The savages among us must be treated as savages. Except so they are

not safe; they can't appreciate any other way."

Haig, at all events, was appreciating his unfitness for argument. He sought to turn.

"Well," he said, "if the law's imperfect because it's of man, the ethical sense at least ought to be perfect because it's of God, you say, and whether the legal punishment is too light or whether it is too heavy, the punishment of popular opinion ought to fit the crime. Now, popular opinion deliberately puts the whole burden of the matter on the shoulders of the law, so it ought to stand by what the law says. It chooses a faulty agent, but it is a choice and should be abided by. When the law's done with a man, society ought to be satisfied."

The bishop sadly shook his head.

"My dear boy," he replied, "that's all very well in theory, but not in fact. In fact, we don't, any of us, live for ourselves alone. We can't even—things being as they are—live only for those who love us. We must live for the whole race, for each and every one of God's creatures. In these matters,

then, you must, in so far, sink your individuality and inquire what is best for the race. Now that race, you may depend upon it, knows better, as a race, than any one member of it, and by the race-conscience—divinely inspired, as an integral part of the high motive in the great drama—certain customs are ordained, and in it certain instincts are engendered. You may rely on it, I say, that they are right."

"In every case?"

"When they are outgrown they are cast off, easily and naturally, for new ones. Your case, as I've said, is an exception. But all these instincts are from the many for the many. Consequently, you can't expect those who are unacquainted with the details of an exception to admit it as an exception, or to drop other affairs to inquire into its merits. You know and I know that yours is one. The only proper thing for us to do, the only right way, as I have said, and the only way we can hope to succeed—and I'm beginning to think that success and right are usually, at the goal, hand in hand—is simply not to offend

the many by letting them know anything about it."

"And that is why you counsel silence?"

"It is. This has been a blow to us both, but every blow of this sort has its lesson. Our duty in this world is to submit to the corrections of Heaven and try to see their reason."

"I don't see the logic of this one."

"I've told you. Think over what I have said. You must not get morbid and feel that you've lost anything by this accident. What have you lost? You're the same man at this moment who has sat here and talked to me before to-day. We are always in motion in this life; the spiritual world is just as much in motion as the material, and if you have not changed for the worse, it is pretty certain that you have changed for the better."

"How can that be?" asked John.

The bishop hesitated, but only for the twinkling of an eye.

"Well," he replied, "haven't you indeed gained an invaluable knowledge of the real world? Haven't we both? And isn't it the

real world, after all, in which we and all men must live? However fine the stand we tried to take, it was a false stand, and now at last we plant our feet on the firm basis of fact. Fact is just another word for unpleasant truth, but because a truth is unpleasant does not by any means prove that it's wrong; indeed, it seems more and more to me to be an evidence of its righteousness. I am speaking, of course, abstractly and of the world of decency."

"But," said John, "I have always thought that a falsely conceived nobility could be, and generally must be, finer than an ignoble truth. I've always felt that a sublime fallacy is truer than a worldly fact, and that to regard ethical things in any other sense was to regard them with a sense of cunning."

"But, my dear boy, you are calling little things by big names. I am sure that you will agree with me that you are at any rate no worse than most men, and that you will not be regarded as worse so long as you maintain the civil silence which the mature

thought of generations has, for some reason or other, determined is best. I think you know me well enough to be sure that I would not for worlds counsel you to any wrong——"

"Oh!" John protested, "I'm sure of that, of course. And don't—please don't think that I blame you in any way for all this. I suppose we've each in our own manner suffered from a common delusion and both incurred a common awakening."

The churchman nodded.

"Exactly," he replied. "Reason from that and you will see that I am right at last, and that the world isn't a very wrong place. To look at the situation, too, from a practical side: Who, in the final summing up, knows of your past? Besides you, only an uncle who will not tell; a politician who, even judged by your standard, has no longer the requisite inducement; a just man who would not, and a miserable brute whose word could not affect you one way or the other."

"Then you'd advise me not to question any longer the good or evil of prevailing

laws? I see. Well, I dare say you're right. At all events, I'm just now removed, as you point out, from the necessity of questioning them. I haven't the inclination to do so, either, and I've too severely learned that to try it is dangerous and useless. It all seems to come to this: that one might as well be a utilitarian in this life, since, be the laws whatever else they choose, they're inbred and omnipotent."

"They are. The rest will come in time. Of course, all this has been a terrible shock, but there is only ill to be had by dwelling upon that side of it now. Now, in fact, it is necessary only to add that you have centred your hopes too exclusively upon one thing. My dear John," the bishop concluded, "shall I tell you the reason of all unhappiness? It is because we focus our hopes. We focus our telescopes upon one star, and that goes out and we are left in darkness. Though all the myriads of heaven blaze, they can blaze then not for us. Do not focus upon any one star to the exclusion of the rest. Sweep the whole heavens, and so, though a thou-

sand stars go out, there will still, for you, be delight in a hundred thousand. Be as provident with your hopes as you are with your gold. The wise man distributes his savings among many banks."

XIII

SIR ORACLE RICKER

Haig slept that night and the fact was significant. It stood, of course, chiefly for exhaustion, but it was not without a modicum of the acquiescence which is the most convincing sign of failure. He had suddenly been thrust back, down the hill of his old desire, and he had lost in the fall something of the power that would have enabled him once more to take up the weary task of Sisyphus. He awoke mentally, of course, to no realization of this, but the lack of comprehension for any save material change was in itself one of his gravest symptoms. He bathed, and he came from the cold tubbing with a real zest to undertake what the bishop had called beginning over; but he had received a blow which made it impossible for him yet to return to the former view that would have

regarded such a beginning as a compromise and something worse.

Of Phyllis, however, he was thinking not a little, and there was the most significant feature of all. He did not feel even the need to justify his new attitude towards her. He was in a healthy physical glow and a mental glow, less healthy, perhaps, but all the more imperative. He needed her now, he felt, more than ever. What though she was the daughter of Billy Gwynne? John was a citizen of the world. Without doubt she was the pearl among women, but he was as fit to win her as—could, if he tried, fall no farther short of deserving her than—any of those to whom the contest was open. His practical considerations did go so far as to weigh, for a brief moment, the matter of his past in its relation to the girl, but he easily dismissed the subject with the thought that there was plenty of time for telling her his secret. He would tell her, of course, but not at once. He failed, therefore, to note that, according to the image of her which was then in his mind's eye, he was loving not, as once, the schoolgirl

that she had been, but the woman that she was. Yet as he thought of her his whole soul filled with an odd tenderness. He forgot, so far as he was then concerned, that he had adopted the conventional attitude, and determined, with this single return to his original position, that he was at any rate as good as, if not better than, her father. How she could be the daughter of this politician he could not guess. He knew only that he loved her, that he needed her, that he must have her to-day, now, and that in some near to-morrow he must win her forever and forever.

At breakfast the bishop tentatively put forth the suggestion that they should wait a day before they approached the financial stronghold of Parton and Company, and Haig found himself strangely willing to wait. It might all come in good time; he was no longer to play a hand in the great game of life; he had earned, he half-defiantly declared, a little rest.

After luncheon he could even go out for a stroll. It was his one purpose to fill out, as best he might, the hours before those during

which he was most likely to find Phyllis at home, and his steps half-mechanically carried him in the direction of the Gwynne house.

Half-way there he was forced to pause before the apparition of Jimmy Ricker, fresh upon his afternoon assignment, but keen for gossip, descending greedily upon John, and grinning his too strikingly fresh-toothed smile.

"Hello!" cried Ricker, joyously solicitous, like the best of us, after a friend's misfortune. "What was the trouble with you at the office? I heard a little gab about it. What was the fuss?"

"Oh," replied Haig with astonishing ease, "I had a little difference of opinion with Fealy."

"Ain't he a skunk, though?" cried Jimmy enthusiastically—it was his favourite subject. "Didn't I tell you to watch him?"

"It was a case," John reluctantly admitted, "of his watching me."

"Oh, well"—Ricker waved all hair-splitting—"he's a skunk, anyhow! Didn't you

ever hear what he done to me? Didn't you? Why, they was all talkin' about it!" The little fellow plunged into a long account of his own wrongs, and for some short time Haig allowed his thoughts to wander, comfortable with the assurance that he would escape the cross-examination which he had begun to fear.

But, at the conclusion of Ricker's narrative, John had no sooner expressed a perfunctory condolence than Jimmy, with the true "news-sense," fired at him the repeated question: "But what was your fuss about, anyhow?"

John, in his new character, considered. There was nothing to be gained by antagonizing the absurd city editor. Were he silent, he might bide his time for revenge, whereas, should he speak at present, he was certain that this well-meaning gossip would see to it that his words reached the office.

"Well," he said at last with an effort at diplomacy, "Fealy didn't like the way I covered a story that he sent me out on."

But Jimmy was nothing if not direct.

"Say," he persisted, "something about the Elridge case, wasn't it?"

This time Haig replied in a tone which partially silenced even Ricker, though, as he might have guessed, he was but adding fresh fuel for future wonder.

"Yes," he snapped.

The true reporter never shows himself more than partially abashed. Ricker took a new tack.

"Seen what we've got about him this morning?" he asked.

"About whom?"

"Elridge, of course."

Haig shook his head. He had not seen it, and did not just then care what it was.

"Well, say, he's jugged this time."

In John's heart interest awoke with a start.

"He's what?" he asked.

"Arrested."

"What for?"

"Oh, I don't know, but you can bet it's safe! He's got it right at last. That's straight."

"But I thought they didn't know where he was."

"Didn't they, though? Oh, he's not been nabbed here! They've caught him in his own State. Goin' t' railroad him sure. Happened last night. My, I tell you it's a great game!" And Jimmy winked as if he partially understood the truth.

The wink startled John even more, but he nevertheless managed to inquire:

"How's that?"

"Why—don't you see?—he'll never have a chance to talk about these people over here now. He was arrested for another thing—some deal, or something, of his up there."

In Ricker's tone there was a genuine and innocent admiration for the genius who had conceived this stroke.

"You don't mean to say," asked John, "that 'these people' were back of it—of the arrest, I mean?"

Ricker laughed mildly.

"Bet yo' life! Good eye, eh?" Then, evidently seeing that there was nothing more to be learned from Haig, the reporter broke

off with: "Of course, you can't prove it, that's the beauty of it; but I know how these gangs work. Well, I've got to get around here to a blamed ministers' meeting; old friend of mine, Dr. Bellows, goin' t' blow off. Fine old chap. Ever met him? Salt of the earth, I tell you. Next time I see you, I'll tell you about a funny experience I had with him a couple of years ago. So long!"

XIV

CUPID'S COUPÉ

It could not be possible. Even Haig could not believe it possible that Elridge's unlucky confession was behind the piece of news which Ricker had just imparted. Yet the conversation served, at any rate, to recall Gwynne to his memory, recently occupied only with considerations of the fellow's daughter, and John's blood was able once more to warm to the boiling-point.

So far as any ethical advancement was concerned, his anger, of course, meant nothing. Rather it meant a further retreat from his former position, for it was blind, unreasoning, revengeful. Whatever had brought it into his life, its controlling motive was hate, the hate of a dog that a man has beaten, but failed spiritually to subdue. Yet its sheer violence finally so focused upon the man

alone as to divorce him entirely from all the rest of the world, and allow John, two minutes later, as he passed Phyllis's house, to greet that young lady at her carriage-door with perfect equanimity.

"You are going?" he asked, accepting her little gloved hand.

She leaned through the door held open by a stolid coachman.

"You weren't, I suppose?" she laughed.

"Whither thou goest——" began John.

"Oh, not until you're asked!"

"I had hoped——"

"You wouldn't have hoped if you'd known my mission."

"And that is——"

"Shopping."

"How delightful! I have never yet set out with a woman upon a shopping expedition."

"Then that accounts for your queer point of view."

"It isn't pleasant?"

"I like it."

"But I mean for the man."

"You are always thinking of yourself. I might have known. Well, if you want to see whether or no men are justified in their horror of it, there is only one way to learn."

"I should like to find that way."

"Very well, jump in; but I warn you that experience is a hard mistress, and you'll find it a bore waiting in the carriage."

"Oh, I don't owe experience a penny for tuition so far in life! And as for the tiresome part of it, I consider that it's better to be bored waiting here and there for five minutes at a time than everywhere for the whole afternoon."

"Then hurry! I always insist on promptness when I'm shopping."

He got in beside her at once; the door next instant closed behind them, and with a delicate clinking of the harness, the horses began their rhythmical course over the smooth asphalt.

It was a crisp autumn afternoon, and the carriage was a closed one. The windows were open, to be sure, and through them

came all the noises of the city; came, too, little kaleidoscopic glimpses of the crowds. But to both the young people inside all these things were very far away, were only distant echoes, were flotsam and jetsam washed by the careless tide upon their desert isle. They were alone and together.

Haig had forgotten everything but that; Phyllis was herself fearfully playing with the gladness of it. Both were allowing themselves to be more serious than ever before since the night of the bishop's dinner.

John thought of this and, after an instant, began:

"Do you know, we're just a thousand miles away again?"

She made her last attempt at levity.

"What a man of distances!" she laughed. "I had no idea you were what your papers call 'travelled.'"

"Not my papers, please. I'm out of all that now."

"Out of it?"

John began to foresee another explanation, and merely nodded.

"What!" pursued Phyllis, "you're no longer with the Globe-Express?"

"No longer. I've"—he hesitated an instant and then added—"I've determined to go into a bank."

"How prosaic! What ever led you to believe that your talents didn't run towards journalism?"

"My employers."

"And you took their word after having heard mine to the contrary?"

"Ah, now, if they had heard your word! But, after all, there are no newspapers in the Hesperides."

"And that's where we are now? Then the Hesperides must be duller than I'd have thought from this. There'd be no interesting reporters to ask one for one's picture."

"I shall introduce newspapers at once," vowed John.

"I hope so. But here's my first shop. I'll be only a moment, for I want, honestly, to hear more about the garden."

She was gone with a stronger puff of air from the opened door that brought him back

to America with a sudden flutter of lingerie that solaced his exile. Her last remark was so sincere that, for her part, she seemed, in the store, to hurry a great deal, though to John the time was long enough.

Haig's return, however, was only temporary. He was for a moment in the every-day life, but the next he had retreated, chafing at the delay, far into his fancy.

When she did reappear he noticed that she was giving more than commonly detailed instructions to the coachman.

"Now," she said, settling herself beside him, as they again set off, "I'm going to prove to you that I am interested in your strange country. I've been wrong enough to tell Thomas to drive us round about, and I've given up the rest of my shopping."

John attempted a mild protest, but she cut him short.

"Please," she said. And though she was smiling, the touch of her gloved hand upon his sleeve and the very serious eyes that were looking into his restored him easily enough to the mood he so desired.

Of troubles with one's employers and the question of a living wage she had never known, and so never thought to inquire of him, but his later tone had once more half-discovered to her the sweet something which she was at last trembling to hear.

Haig, on his side, was anxious enough to begin. He was intoxicated by their proximity, by their privacy. There was in it, he felt, something delightfully tacit, and this delight of it drove from his conscience all memory of the past. Under her gaze he felt just now no embarrassment in laying bare what was then to him the one important secret of his heart—felt only that he must speak to her about it all as a child, and, swelled with the first sense of mastery, loved her the better for her innocence of it.

"My country?" he repeated. "It's a land where only two people can live at a time, I'm afraid, but where they live forever; 'a land where all things always seem the same,' and from which those two can look out across the blue waters to the horizon, 'heart handfast in heart,' and never

wish to take ship for the hidden world beyond."

Love makes all men poets, and John was speedily carried away by the creative impulse. He lost himself and Phyllis among the images he called easily forth to their need; he found waiting at his lips poems that he had forgotten ever to have read. He rose almost to real art, and his companion, following him with wistful eyes already tired of this world, with hand that she had forgotten to withdraw from his arm, rose also and lost herself in his flight.

It was thus with surprising suddenness that they found themselves stopping again, this time before Phyllis's home. Both were startled, but Haig, as a man, recovered by far the more quickly. It was at the tip of his tongue to seize the instant, to make in so many words the declaration with which they had both been playing, but he hesitated for one brief moment. Then the tiger had descended, the door had again been flung open, and as John leaped out and shouldered about, himself to help his companion, he

caught a glimpse of Billy Gwynne advancing from far down the street.

"It was a pretty fairy-tale," said Phyllis.

"It was the truth," was all that John could then reply.

XV

THE DEAD SPEAK

Haig had no trouble in getting into the bank—the trouble was to stay there. If the employment had come to him while he was in his earlier attitude towards life, his assurance would have safely carried him through both its drudgery and the unpleasant memories which it awakened. But now things were different. He had had a taste of an easier life, and he had accepted the conventional standard. He was a man who had in his life something of which he must be ashamed, a past which he must hide, and the now hard and uncongenial work combined with the surroundings to make secrecy daily more difficult.

From nine o'clock in the morning until one in the afternoon, and again, after a brief period allotted for luncheon, until the bal-

ance was found at five, or sometimes at seven, he sat in a damp-smelling, echoing, sepulchral room, deep behind a wire cage, on a high stool at a higher and sloping desk. There, under a brilliant incandescent lamp that burned amid the gloom however brightly the sun might be shining outside, he added, from beneath a green eye-shade, with neat pen but stiffened fingers and swimming brain, long columns of dancing figures in a great blue- and red-lined book. For a man accustomed to most humble occupations the hours would have been easy enough, but for any the work would have been hard. It was a continuous strain; the position of the body was unnatural, and the faculties must be ever constantly alert—at their best. Time was when Haig's body insensibly accustomed itself to these conditions, and his mind, while regarding other things, could at the same time become a mere counting-machine. But that time was past. He was now often not one hour at his desk before his back ached, his hand grew cramped, and his head throbbed with pain.

Yet he kept on. About him he saw younger and better-fitted men filling higher positions, and older ones who, after years of this incessant grind, had managed to gain and could just gain only such a place as his own. But he shut his teeth together and kept stinging eyes and weary fingers to their task. He had attacked the world in his own way and been beaten. Now, he said, he had adopted what seemed to be the world's own methods, and was resolved to make thereby his way to the front.

Not that the situation was without its obvious consolations. His evenings were at last all his own, and the bishop's influence had opened to him many doors, through one or other of which he passed nightly into the presence of Phyllis, who swiftly grew from girlish uncertainty, beneath his eyes, to a sweet maturity of thought. As yet he had not been able to recover the chance he had thrown away in her carriage, but he could nevertheless gain from her enough silent messages to allow him to bide, in peace, his time. He was not yet worried over the ques-

tion of the wherewithal. As he had once been too idealistic, he was now too commonsense to bother about that. There, and there alone, Billy Gwynne again assumed his natural relation, in Haig's mind, to his daughter. The politician was perfectly well able, as he himself had said, to put the clerk in the way of all that was necessary, and the politician owed the clerk all that he could give.

Unavoidably the father and suitor met, but upon such occasions the former was simply his social self and the latter a man of so much and so easily the same type as to arouse in Gwynne's mind a puzzling doubt as to whether, after all, this was a Don Quixote. Not that he cared to give the matter much thought. Too many other things of more moment claimed that busy gentleman's attention. His family was not in the class that leans towards breakfast-table confidences, and, keen as he might have been in most matters, he was too closely confined by his own conception of morality to guess that, after the interview in his office, such a man as Haig could so adapt and misapply it as to seek his

daughter. He had merely found it necessary, through John's own fault, added to a deceptive manner of approach, to recall certain things to the young man's mind. Beyond that single occasion the fellow's personal history did not interest him. So long as he did not meddle with Gwynne's affairs, Haig, as a well-certified and properly conducted person, might fight, unhampered by him, his own battle in the great social war. Gwynne, at all events, was too much of a gentleman, he would have told you, to interfere.

Meanwhile, John was becoming well accustomed, if not to his new work, at least to his new point of view, when it one evening unexpectedly received an authoritative confirmation. He was hurrying away from the bank after a particularly hard day and, upon rounding the corner of a side street as a short-cut for the bishop's, was hailed from a doorway by an unfamiliar voice.

"Hello!"

Haig looked up. Before him stood an uncertain individual, heavy, broad-shouldered, a man with a stoop that had not yet degen-

erated into a slouch; a face which, though obviously never intellectual and always coarse of feature, must yet once have been flushed and fat and good-natured, but was now peaked and drawn, with pale, timid eyes and thin, bloodless lips. The voice had been strange to him because John had never before heard it raised to conversational pitch; the face he remembered at once as that of a man who had, during a part of Haig's term and up to the time of his departure from the jail, occupied a cell in the same tier with him.

"Hello!" he replied, and put out his hand with just a shade of embarrassment. He was glad to see the fellow, a little afraid, perhaps, to be seen with him, and altogether disturbed by the reminder of other days. In the end, the sense that this was a common sufferer won the uppermost place.

There was a moment's silence. The stranger shuffled his heavy feet uneasily. At last he tried to laugh.

"Well," he said finally, "you see I'm out."

"How long?" asked John.

"Three days. I got the regular good-con' time off, of course."

"Well——" Haig hesitated. He had seen this man every day for close upon five years, the latter half of his prison years; they had done each other all those thousand little clandestine kindnesses which made their life at all endurable, and yet he did not know his fellow's name.

"I guess I'll answer to Newton," said that person.

John read his meaning with a glance. The renewed association quickened his perception and revived the prison directness. In jail, if you do not wish entirely to miss the chance of speaking, you must say exactly what you mean. There is no time for false modesty.

"Why didn't you stick to your real name?" he asked.

"No, thanks. I'm going in for the square—the other thing don't pay—but I'm not a sucker all the same. I'm wise enough yet, an' I guess all my other names are too well known."

"But I've kept mine."

"Oh, that was different! You were never out for the regular thing. You're on the square, too, aren't you?"

John flushed, but nodded.

"I knew you were. I've been looking for you."

"Anything particular?"

Again Newton shuffled his feet. He looked about nervously.

"Can't we get a drink some'eres?" he asked.

John led the way to an empty back-room in a lonely saloon, and they sat down at the blackened table under a low roof.

"Whisky?" asked Haig.

"Not on your life! I'm afraid of the stuff; it always raises the devil with me. Give me a beer."

They drank for a minute or more in silence. Then—

"Well?" John suggested.

Newton took his meaning easily enough.

"It's this way," he said, still evidently unused to the effort of sustained conversa-

tion. "The day before I left we had a new moke in that used to have something to do with this town. Well, that was the day after the fire. You saw about the fire?"

"No," said Haig, anxious only to get on.

"Oh, that was a big time! Whole northwest wing burned. But I'll tell you all about that later. We were shy on room, and so as I was a good-con' man and this mug was a greeny, they doubled us up for the night."

Newton took a long pull at the beer and John began a devil's tattoo on the table.

"Well," the former at last continued, "we got to talkin' all night. There was lots he wanted to know about the place, an' lots I wanted to know about what was doin' outside. An' it turned out he knew you."

"Who was he?"

"I'm comin' to that—I'm comin' to that. He said you were on the level an' you'd stood by him the best you knew how, an' he wanted to do you a good turn now his game was up. See?"

"You must mean Elridge."

"Yes, that was him.—So he manages to get me a line to his lawyer, an' I stops off there once I'm out an' gets a letter the lawyer-chap had, an' I'm to give it to you."

"A letter?" repeated the bewildered John.

Newton at once took the defensive.

"I don't know nothin' else about it. The lawyer-chap said it was all on the level, an' he seemed straight, so it wasn't no business o' mine to read it."

"Where is the letter?"

Newton's thick but deft hands plunged into an inner pocket of his cheap black coat and produced an envelope, which he tossed across the board.

Haig opened it and read these words hurriedly scrawled in lead-pencil upon a sheet of common note-paper:

"Have squared Josephs. Will have roll for your friends Dearing and Cole to-morrow."

The missive was unsigned; it was crumpled and torn; evidently it had been thought-

lessly tossed aside and then recovered. But the writing itself was clear, and—as there flashed across Haig's brain the memory that Dearing and Cole were the two contractors whom Elridge, in his bid for the city jail, was supposed to have "bought off"—so was the writer.

"So even this man writes letters," he said with forced calm. "To think of Gwynne—— What fools they are! What fools!"

Newton detected the concealed emotion, but misconstrued it.

"It wasn't my fault," he protested. "What's the row? I thought the lawyer-chap was on the level. I—I wanted to help you."

Haig regarded him steadily, smiling now. The man's white face was all earnestness, all concern. His light eyes quickened with anxiety. The kindness, the blind sympathy, touched John.

"There isn't any trouble," he said. "It's all right. I'm much obliged to you. I was a little surprised at first. I couldn't see how this thing could be of any use to me, right

away. But I see now it may perhaps be—sometime."

A few weeks before he would not have seen, but now things were different. Now he was playing the game according to the rules, and a trump card, however unrequired for the trick just then on the board, was always worth holding fast to. He replaced the note in its envelope; he slipped it carefully into his wallet.

Newton heaved a sigh of relief.

"Well, I'm glad it's all O. K.," he said. "You seemed to take on so I thought maybe I'd put my foot in it."

"Not at all. This won't be of any use just now, but it's a good thing to have—a very good thing—and I'm ever so much obliged to you for coming all the way here to do this for me."

He looked at the man, smiling again, but Newton's face changed from white to red. His eyes dropped to the stained table, and he twitched his glass nervously.

"I guess I didn't come just for that," he finally admitted.

Haig waited.

For a moment more Newton trifled with the beer-glass; then, gently rocking it to and fro with unsteady hand but gaze intent, he continued:

"You see, this is the way of it: I'm out now an' I don't mean to get back. The graft don't pay. I want to be square, but how the devil can I? I'm known; I've got a rotten bad slate an' a bad name. There ain't any reference for me, an' you can't get much work 'thout one. I could 'a' gone to one o' those gospel-missions, but I want t' forget my record, an' they won't stand for any keeping quiet when they get you a job. I could 'a' broke stone or something o' that sort a year or two ago, but I've got this damned cough now, an' it makes me too weak. So—you see—I—I thought p'raps——"

The effort was too much for him; he stopped, giving a push to his glass that sent the beer spilling over the table.

John rose suddenly to his feet. Newton was another Haig to him. He understood him too well to doubt his sincerity. He

even dropped into something of his manner.

"Come ahead!" he cried, trying hard to laugh. "I've been up against your very game; I know it through and through, and I'll guarantee to get you a job inside of an hour."

For Newton one glance sufficed. He had sought his old prison-fellow as an equal, as a friend, with all the true republicanism of a convict, and he had not come in vain. He put out a hand of thanks to John.

Then a strange thing occurred. Haig saw the proffer and hesitated to respond. The next instant, however, and before even Newton's quick eye could have detected the reluctance, an odd something rose into John's throat, the sudden badge of shame swept across his face, and he gripped the man's hand heartily.

"Do you think," he asked, still striving for the lighter notes, "do you think you could stand such a berth as a sexton's?"

"Take care of a church?" gasped Newton.

"Only a small affair, a little chapel downtown. I'm sorry," Haig continued, seeing how far his companion was taken aback, "but, just at present it's the only thing I happen to know of. Of course we'll stick together, and I'll keep my peelers out for something better all the while."

"Oh, it wasn't that," Newton reassured him. "Board an' lodging's all I'm after just now. It just seemed such a funny game—me in a church!"

"Why not?" asked Haig almost sharply. "I'm in one almost every Sunday, and I'm sure you've gone often enough with me before now."

"Oh, up there! That was different. We had to."

"Well," continued John more gently, "if you're straight now, that's the place for you."

He was so satisfied with his own compromise that he was intolerant of any doubt in others.

"I guess you're right," admitted Newton.

"Of course I am."

"I'd do it, anyhow; you can bet on that. I'm not choicy. I only was thinkin'——"

"Well?"

"Supposin' they'd know, you know?"

"Why should they? As long as a man's square his past life's his own business. I'm going to introduce you to my uncle, who's—who's a bishop, and I think he can fix things. I heard him speak of this job only last night at dinner. All you've got to do is to keep straight, and I know you'll do that, all right. The rest's my own affair."

"Yes," said Newton dubiously, "but the only real way's never to get jugged in the first place."

"What's done's done," protested Haig, ruffled once more, and driven to that last refuge, the adage—"and the least said, soonest mended."

He did not like these expressions of an attitude he deprecated, and, having delivered himself of the final platitude, he turned the conversation into those more practical channels where argument, which he always detested, must give place to less futile things.

Once at the house, he made straight for his uncle's study, where, in a mullioned bow-window, Bishop Osgood was reading the De Imitatione.

As Haig entered first, the devotee rose smiling. They had not, of late, been seeing much of each other; there seemed to have been a tacit understanding whereby each should gracefully regard the other's present discomfiture by some such arrangement, and so, no doubt, the clergyman's smile was a bit quizzical. But it was, at all events, well-bred, and—

"Well," he began, as John, now that he was here, involuntarily paused. "How's it gone to-day?"

As he spoke he caught sight of Newton, half-hidden by a kindly shadow, and came a few steps forward.

"Uncle," said John, "this is Mr. Newton, an old friend of mine."

The two men nodded. The former convict was again about to offer his hand, but Haig, as if unseeing, stepped impulsively between the two and, as Newton's

movement was unnoted by the bishop, continued:

"He comes here from another city, and he wants some sort of work. Of course, I can answer for him, and I thought he'd make a first-rate sexton at Mr. Marvin's new mission. I remember you said he needed a good man."

The bishop was still of a somewhat unsuspecting nature; he had not yet had his eyes opened quite as far as they might be. He was nervous, moreover, in John's presence, anxious to atone for, or at least cover, this by any reasonable favour, and above all desirous to escape the once so valued private conversations with his nephew. Thus it happened that he then greeted Newton pleasantly, arranged to get him, next day, a position as caretaker at the little chapel in the slums, and said good-bye, with no further thought of inquiring into the condition of either of his pensioners.

XVI

A DECLARATION OF DEPENDENCE

THERE had been a theatre-party, with Mrs. Gwynne in the rôle of an ideal chaperon, which had ended at Phyllis's home, and after which John, with the stubborn determination of a half-formed plan, had held on until all the other guests had taken their leave, and even the mother of his sweetheart had somehow insensibly vanished.

Yet now that after his week of waiting he stood, the door propitiously open, upon the very threshold of action, Haig felt nevertheless tremulously unprepared for entrance. He was, indeed, not at all certain as to the manner best fitted for the crossing of the sill. When he had first met her he would not have paused to consider any questions of etiquette, but now he thought of himself always as changed. Put suddenly before him an un-

expected need for action and he would still plunge forward as impulsively and as assuredly as of old; but introduce the slightest element of suspense, and he would hold back trying to plan both words and movement. This might last but for a brief period, yet he still retained all his former inaptitude for scheming and, bitterly denying the slightest sign of weakness, he would at once lose himself in anger with his mental perturbation.

They were seated in the library on the second floor—the affair had been a small one and most informal—and even John's share of the conversation had been borne glibly enough while others were present, but once they were alone a nervous little silence obtained. John was vowing himself to his course, and Phyllis was woman enough to know it.

The girl, however, was, in the nature of things, less able to bear the pause, and was thus, with one of her timid attempts at the commonplace, the first to break it.

"So you are miles away again?" she asked.

Sadly fearing that he had been overworking the figure, he must yet grasp, perforce, its slender opportunity.

"In the garden of Hesperides," he answered.

"That's unkind," said Phyllis, "for we have a garden here of our own—not a Greek one, to be sure, or even a German one, you know—but a garden—— Well, you can see it from that window at your back."

John turned as if he had been struck. Behind him were a pair of swinging windows. With instant inspiration he rose and flung them open.

"Come," he demanded, "you invite comparison."

"Hardly that," she disclaimed, "only inspection."

But she followed him out upon a little hand-railed iron balcony, and he drew the stained windows behind them.

It was one of those strangely artificial, almost theatrical nights which are supplied only by the balmy winters of our Middle Atlantic States. The air was still, but stimulat-

ing; cool, yet one which in any other quarter of the globe would be proper to autumn. It seemed, too, of that luminous green quality, so rich at all times, and in these latitudes so rare. The sky was no longer a canopy. Instead, it conveyed that impression of space which is so poignant on a clear night when the moon has resigned its power to the living multitudes of stars. Above the lovers these palpitated in myriad legions from the nearest planet to dim distant dust of worlds. Far to the eastward red Mars was overtaking pale Saturn close to where, just above the horizon, glowed King Jupiter.

Dimly both man and girl felt that the planets were throbbing with speech, with music, were alive with a message for these two who seemed alone in all the universe beneath them. Their earnest light washed the bare limbs of the trees below, spiritualized them with cold flame from the altar. It subdued on the balcony the rococo background of the dimly lighted, cool-coloured window, threw into purified relief John Haig's still honest face and, as the lover looked at Phyl-

lis, played round about her a shaft of light from the volcanic core of space that made cryptic her filmy pale draperies and enhanced the whiteness of an ungloved arm, of virgin shoulders, and slim throat. Her whole lithe girlish figure was etherealized, and her parted lips, her delicate features, her chestnut hair, all caught the strange light, and radiated her awe of it. Her great hazel eyes, upturned, reflected it.

The silence was this time one that neither wished to break. Phyllis was again the girl of the earlier picture, and John, feeling only that he loved her in whatever guise, feared at first to touch her lest she should vanish into the starlight. Yet now his earlier form of indecision had disappeared, and when he kissed her she neither spoke nor shrank from him.

He took one of her hands between both of his own.

"You have known it always," he whispered.

She looked up in his grave, clear-cut face.

"Always," she answered.

"And you know that you will know it always?" he asked.

And "Always," she again replied.

Her arms twined tight about his neck. They were firm, warm, living arms; they thrilled him, but the contact brought both lovers back to the world, and they drew apart instinctively for a moment, a little frightened by all that they had done.

For a moment only. Then John mastered it and drew her with him. If they were back to earth, the earth was all the dearer for these new selves of theirs. He held her close again, close against him, their lips together in one of those kisses that tell of a long hunger, of thirst, of delay turned sweet in this consummation. He felt her arms once more straining about his shoulders, he felt her breast tossing upon his own. What was any world now? What were all the worlds? It was this, this that he had been waiting for from the very beginning of time—this red mouth, this living woman and her love for him.

With a laugh of strength John broke the spell of the night.

"I thought," he said, "those tiresome people would never give me this chance to tell you."

She guessed and made the reply he most desired.

"So did I," she confessed.

"And then," he continued, kissing her with every word, "I was afraid when the chance did come."

"Was I so very terrible?"

"An ogress." And he kissed her again just to prove it. "I think," he continued, "I have never been so afraid of you before."

"Not that first night when you came, you know, for the picture?"

"Then least of all. I—I loved you from that instant. I wonder if you could know what you were to me then?"

She could not, but, woman-like, she wanted to.

"More than now?" she pouted.

"No," he began, "not just at that time——"

For one tremendous instant he hesitated, no longer. At times such as these it was not yet in him, once well under way, long to pause. Why should he trouble her with a thing that, according to either his old or new standard, it was best she should never know? He knew that, with Gwynne's letter in his pocket, there was not one chance in a thousand of her ever learning the truth. Not that it would matter if she did. He was sure, as her warm hand touched his own, that she loved him too well for that. But there was no good reason why he should ever inflict her with the knowledge, least of all why he should inflict her now. There was truth, of course, and truth—— Well, he would tell her, but upon a future occasion.

"But just at that time," he went on—and Phyllis was far too rapt to attach importance to the pause—"I had been very much alone in the world for a long while. I was always very much alone, for that matter. And then I had come into a new city, a strange one. I hardly knew a soul. I didn't

understand my work; it was very different from what I'd expected, and I was—well, I was lonesome."

She pressed his hand and began to ask him a thousand questions, some few of his past life, but most of his present heart, and all of these he managed to answer with truth and to her satisfaction. Together then they traversed, incident by incident, their meeting, their words and thoughts on this occasion or on that, up to the present momentous evening.

"And when those people," said John—they both were pitying the unloved rest of the world—"when those people did leave I couldn't bring myself to tell you—in there where they'd been; they'd left too much of themselves about the place."

Phyllis laughed reminiscently.

"Was that," she asked, "why you jumped so at my suggestion of the garden?"

"Was that," responded John, "why you made it?"

"I shall never tell you," she declared.

But, even in the starlight, he could see her blush.

"At any rate," he persisted, "you almost overdid it, for when we got out here, so awfully alone, you—you somehow looked so unearthly that I was more afraid than ever. I never saw you as beautiful—I never did, and you are beautiful, you know you are. Body and soul you are the most beautiful woman in the world."

He believed it, and from weak protestings she shrunk to silence, and listened with head thrown back and half-closed eyes to all his song of her. But at its close she trembled for them both. Haig thought that she was cold, and she knew that it would be useless to attempt to undeceive him, and so followed him silently back into the softly lighted room.

Once inside between the familiar bookshelves and seated near the great study-table heaped with magazines, the conventional again resumed over both something of its sway.

"Do you know, sir," she asked, "that you

have omitted one unimportant detail of your love-making?"

"No doubt. I'm glad it's not more. You see, I'm new at it."

"Thank you, so am I."

"Oh, I didn't mean that!" He kissed her hand across the table.

"Now tell me," he added, "what have I overlooked?"

"You have overlooked asking me."

"Then I'll say it now:—Please?"

"Well, you sha'n't go without your punishment. I say yes—wait a bit!—with a condition."

"You've only to name it."

"That we're not to let this be known until next season."

"A whole year!"

"Just that and not a soul. Don't be cross. Oh, John!"—she bent forward for his kiss—"you know the waiting is just as hard for me. But we must. You understand. Why won't you understand? I'm—why, I'm just 'out.'"

"You've been out long enough for me,"

protested John. He was all of a man now. "I don't see why you should want to go about with——"

Phyllis stopped him promptly.

"And don't be a goose," she added. "It's not expected, this sort of thing, just at once —that's all. It's—it's not done, you know."

The words were vague, but the tone told. John understood her at last. He even appreciated. The world, he tried hard to convince himself, was already playing its part not only in his views, but in his emotions as well.

They talked it all over, of course, but he agreed easily. After all, he reflected, she was right according to the standard of youth. She had before her the happiest season of a young girl's life, and she had the clearest right to make the most of it. Besides, as a man, he wanted to see her brilliant, successful, desired. He wanted, though he did not guess it, to be able to watch her admired and courted by Payne and the other young men of her set, and yet to be able to say to himself that she was his. In that time of waiting he would see scarcely less of her, and he

knew how enchanted would seem their stolen moments alone.

"And now," she at last concluded, "we've begun badly. What's happened to mother I can't imagine, but you should have been gone, Mr. Haig, long ago."

"God bless Mrs. Gwynne," said John.

"Amen," said Phyllis.

"And," added Haig, "God bless our secret, too."

She nestled against him and raised her lips to his.

"It will be all the sweeter, dear," she assured him, "because it is a secret and because it is ours."

XVII

A DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

"THE bishop would like to see you in his study, sir."

Thomas, the demure, made this statement with his accustomed placidity.

John turned from his dressing-table, his fingers still busily engaged with a refractory collar.

"All right," he replied as the man retreated. "Tell him I'll be down just as soon as I get into my clothes."

The first two delicious weeks had passed, and he was standing amid a heap of discarded shirts and convicted ties, dressing before keeping an engagement with Phyllis. In the interval everything had gone well. He had seen just enough of her, of course, to want more. He had been walking with the gods. His mind, engrossed only with the

splendid successes of his heart, had passed from its attitude of acceptance of the world's standards to a perfect forgetfulness of both the world and its opinions. He had no thought except for Phyllis.

And yet love had brought him back. With his brain whirling to the tune of her latest words, his fingers must have regained something of their old cunning. A week before the cashier had come to him to talk of an advancement in place and salary of a sort which made him well content to bear his year of waiting for Phyllis before making application to Gwynne. The prospect was good, so good that it cast a still deeper shadow over all that was behind him, and though he still had an occasional dread of his past in its relation to his sweetheart, he managed easily to postpone its consideration with the unanswerable argument that Phyllis would the more readily understand his position when, at the end of her provisional year, he could show her, together with his sin, the sincerity of his repentance and the work that it had wrought through his business prosperity.

So completely was he wrapped in his prevailing mood that he was able to meet his uncle with frank cheerfulness to the end that the bishop was enough relieved heretofore to adopt a similar pose. Not that the good fortune had stopped short at Haig himself. Far from that, it seemed that for his very friends it had proved to be contagious, and only on the yesterday Newton had ventured to appear at the bank, a most respectable, almost clerical figure, with the information that he had so well pleased his rector as to be reluctantly handed over for sexton to a larger church in one of the best sections of the city. It was thus small wonder that John now felt at liberty to enter his uncle's study whistling an air reminiscent of his lately and splendidly renewed acquaintance with the theatre.

No sooner, however, was he inside than the tune died away on his lips.

The bishop met him at the door and shut and locked it behind him. The early darkness had fallen, and the green-shaded drop-lamp on the broad writing-table provided the only light.

"Sit down," said the bishop, and it was then that John's negro melody ended in the middle of a bar.

With drooping jaw, he meekly obeyed the order—for order it unmistakably was—and collapsed expectantly into an easy chair at one side of the table.

The bishop drew up his arm-chair opposite and made a feint of searching among the pages of an unfinished sermon. John greedily noted that his white hands trembled until the episcopal ring cast queer rays upon the fluttering manuscript. He saw also that the once mild eyes were sparkling with excitement, that the mouth was twitching the whole patriarchal beard, and that the entire face must have altered with his own point of view during the last several weeks.

For Haig the start was sudden.

"I'm sorry," he said weakly, "to have kept you waiting, sir."

Immediately the bishop found the letter. Clearly he had been pausing for a cue of whatever sort. One hand pushed away the papers from the red baize of the table-top,

the other held aloft a note which John, at once upon the defensive, saw was written in a hand that was strange to him.

"If that, sir, was all that you had to be sorry for," the bishop declared, "we might cry quits at once."

"I didn't know I'd offended you in any other way. I'm sorry if——"

"Sorry, sorry! You're actually using the word before you know what you've done! And I really believe"—Bishop Osgood brought it out with a veritable gasp—"that you don't know!"

"I am quite at a loss."

"Well, upon my word, upon my word, sir! You've insulted my cloth; you've deceived me; you've attacked the very church; you've brought scandal upon one of my most excellent ministers; you've placed me—not to mention yourself—in the most equivocal of positions; you've caused me no end of trouble, and now you sit there in unruffled evening clothes, and you tell me that you don't know what you've done! I don't believe it."

John caught the contradiction, but he had been too much weakened by his changed life, and was too startled by the suddenness of all that the bishop had said and the way in which he had said it, to indulge in any nice quibbling. The avalanche of accusation swept him completely away, and, as he rolled over with it, he could only ejaculate:

"I tell you I can't imagine what I've done."

"Am I not telling you?" thundered the clergyman—he was always the better preacher the more he was moved. "I'm trying to give you the whole catalogue of your offences if you'll only allow me."

John had not the least desire to interrupt. He now waved a faint hand of acquiescence.

"I got this letter this morning," pursued the bishop, with flaming face and shaking voice. "You were out, of course, and I at once looked up the writer. It's from Dr. Morton, of St. Elizabeth's, one of our best men, in one of our most respectable parishes. Well, I only got back a half-hour ago."

The name of the church awakened a mem-

ory in John, and, as his uncle continued, he began vaguely and doubtfully to understand.

"Some time ago you brought a—a person into this house—into my house—and gave me your word that he was a deserving man. I got him a place on the strength of what you said. Of course, it never occurred to me to doubt your word, and so I gave mine for him. He was transferred only yesterday to St. Elizabeth's, and now it turns out that he's a thief!"

The concluding word brought John up with a jump. His first sensation was one of pain to learn that Newton's repentance had been either so feigned or so weak; his next and more natural was of hurt and indignation at the insult dealt his friendship; but the last and enduring was contrition that he should have been so ready to accept the man as another of his own kind, and that, ever since, he had been so wrapped up in his own happiness as not to have kept track of the fellow and so saved the bishop from this annoying contretemps.

"I'm awfully shocked to hear this," he

declared. "I'm hurt, too, to think that you could suspect me of recommending a crooked man; but, of course, uncle, you're excited, and all I want to do just now is to fix the matter up for you and shoulder all the responsibility myself."

His tone was so frank, so sincere, that the bishop's face cleared a little towards surprise.

"Then you didn't know?" he asked.

"Why, uncle! But there, we'll straighten that out later. At present what I want to say is this: I'll go to Dr. What's-his-name and tell him how it all happened, and, as I've a little money put by, I must insist on being allowed to make good the amount Newton took. I suppose it couldn't have been very much?"

It was now upon the bishop that there descended the shade of bewilderment.

"Very much?" he repeated. "He didn't take anything."

"He—— Why, didn't you say he was a thief?"

"So he is. One of the vestrymen who

came to this city only three years ago, but who's one of our best-known lawyers, defended him in your own State against a charge of burglary only about four years ago, and lost the case."

John's eyes opened wide. He was silent for an instant, but in that instant something of his old strength was vouchsafed to a courage temporarily, though only partially, rehabilitated by the recent days of happiness. He rose to his feet, his own voice now shaking with indignation.

But the thing was too monstrous at once to be believed. He must first make sure.

"And so," he asked, "you call Newton a thief?"

The bishop was too blinded with the passion of the moment to catch the drift of this question.

"Well, a burglar, then," he replied. "It's worse, if you come to that."

"My God!" gasped John.

"How dare you?" cried the bishop, and then left the sublime to jerk forth: "Where're you going?"

"Out of this house," said John. "I don't belong here, and I don't pretend to understand its ways."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that what's sauce for me's sauce for Newton as long as he's square. If he's a thief, why, what am I, what's your nephew whom you recommended everywhere? I ought never to have gone to jail in the first place. I ought never to have accepted your absurd theories afterward. I ought never to have tried to get back among men once I had been in prison, and I ought never to have stayed under your roof a minute after I saw how you took my kissing my aunt. The whole thing's been a farce, a contradiction of nature. You had me go to jail because you said it was my duty to society, and once I'd paid the debt I'd start clean. We both found we were wrong. I don't blame you for that except that you'd had more experience of life than I'd had. But then we decide that it's all right if a man means well and keeps his jail life dark. On that theory you get me a place. Oh, I'm obliged to you for that, only

I don't understand your point of view, and so I'm going, for it seems that when I try the same theory on you it doesn't work."

"Then you did know this about Newton?"

"Certainly."

"And you recommended——" But the bishop stopped. For the first time he saw the weakness of his position. Hurriedly he shifted. "But, my dear boy," he continued, "this is a vastly different matter."

"I don't see it," said John.

"You were an educated man."

"And you got me a position in a business that requires some education. Newton was an uneducated man, and I got him a job that didn't require any education. No, uncle, if the rule holds good for one man in one grade, it holds good for another in another."

"But you could have been more frank with me. You forget my relationship and my views."

"As for the relationship, the secret wasn't mine; and as for your views, your present attitude shows that I was justified in keeping

silence. However, I admit that then I was quiet only because the secret wasn't mine. I thought, then, that your views coincided with those you yourself had put into my head."

"But the position was out of the ordinary."

"So's a position in a bank—for a man with my record."

"Still, I think you might have told me."

"So might you have told Parton. But you had tried that with Fealy—or with Gwynne—and you saw it wouldn't work."

"Tut, tut! Besides, if Dr. Morton had known he might have warned his people. It would then have been only a proper church charity."

"It would have been a brutal exhibition."

"Nonsense! The Church, you know—— There's the whole point. We can't have reflections cast upon the Church. That is different, I tell you, from regular business."

But John was one of those men, generally of few words, who know no limits of speech

when once they have given way to their thoughts. He blazed again.

"I'm tired of that, sir!" he broke out. "I'm sick and tired of that! What's the Church worth if it's got to hide behind that? I'm losing faith in it for one. What's religion for, anyhow, if it can't help us here? I've seen it fail twice in my own case and work just once—and that was as far out of the world as you can get without being dead—in a jail." He reaped the whirlwind as he spoke, and rose from doubt to certain antagonism. "And yet," he went on, "you set it up as a practical guide for living, and then when it fails you'd tell me that its business is not with this life, but the next. Either your precious Cæsar is right or he's wrong. There's no half way. Either my crime deserved ten years, or more, or less. I was willing to serve fifty if the law said so, but it said only ten, and I serve that and come out—to this! It's not that I've been crooked; it's not that I've been caught; it's just simply that I've done what Society's told me to do—gone to jail. And your Church backs it all

up with its mouthing about Cæsar getting his due. Where does our due come in? That's what I want to know. Or don't we have any? Does the modern discovery of the individuality amount to anything or doesn't it? Haven't we any rights as human beings? Haven't we any claim on justice or the State? Or do you go back to the dark ages and say that we lose all that through crime?"

The bishop managed to get in two words:

"You're mad!" he shouted.

"No doubt," retorted John. "They call this a sane world, but I tell you it's all mad, mad, mad! It's lived so long and so long breathed and had its being in an atmosphere of madness that it couldn't bear the atmosphere of truth. The distorted forces of nature must have worked up through the soil into our bodies until we're a race of gibbering lunatics who delight in nothing but cruelty. It seems to be the one law of action and principle of justice; it's the breath in the nostrils. Blood—that's all people want, and because they haven't got the courage of their own lust, because they're afraid of the red

blood of the body, they've got to content themselves with the blood of the soul. Faugh, it stinks to heaven! Oh," he went on, for the bishop had also sprung to his feet, and was making a violent but vain endeavour to interrupt, "oh, I'm not done, and I will finish, too! I'm going once and for all to tell you what I think of the whole affair. I'm sick, I say, of all the rot about the Church and society. How can people talk about a debt to society? Society! What, in Heaven's name, has society ever done for me? It's tricked me and betrayed me, first and last. It sets up a false standard of value and then cheats at the weights. It's a farce, a mask, a whited sepulchre, an arbitrary law of the powerful for the protection of the powerful in wrong. All men are liars; all men thieves. The strong fight the weak and the strong win, but the distinction's only a distinction of strength. Force, timid and cunning, has surrounded itself with a maze of formulæ, set up watchers, sent out its spies in the garments of holiness. It'll call one the Church and the other the law. It's or-

dained customs and promulgated codes and statutes, and the whole form of these it calls Society. But back of it all there is just one thing: force working by means of cunning. Well, I've torn off the masks to my own satisfaction, and I've found the law a tyrant and the Church a hypocrite. The Church!—I'm done with it!"

Had the bishop been on the debating-platform he would have been prompt to move the previous question, or equally prompt to point out that the fallacy of all this raving was pathetically obvious, because John was reasoning from a single instance to a general rule. But as Haig was the inevitable result of an individual will at war with a universal law, the necessary scape-goat turning towards the burning sands, so, too, was his uncle the creature of an environment and the consequence of an accumulated race-experience. Each the product of the same rule, each was absolutely right and utterly blameless, but neither could see that the other was living and acting in the one way logical for him to live and act, and the clergyman could realize only

that he was in his own house instead of a hall of debate, and that he had there been forced to listen, from his own nephew, to an attack upon his own faith. He spluttered a moment with indignation and surprise, and then cried:

"I think you *had* better go! For my part, I shall not listen a moment longer to such blasphemy!"

But there was to be no opportunity. Even to the last the bishop was destined not to get in his word. John had already unlocked, opened, and passed out of the door.

XVIII

EXIT A BANK CLERK

Haig strode to his room, thrust a few clothes and all of his money into a suit-case, wrote a note to Phyllis, rang for a messenger, and then made straight for Newton's last address.

He found the man under the roof of a bourgeois boarding-house, a small, sad-coloured room with pale paper on the walls, and an ill-smelling lamp in a gaudy shade. Newton, strong, and almost rosy again, stood in the midst of a heap of clothes before an open trunk. As John entered he turned with his arms full of stray garments, a sullen anger blazing in his eyes.

It pleased John to be categorical.

"What are you at?" he asked.

"I'm done with it," muttered Newton.

"You mean you're going to cut it out?"

"Yes, sir! I'm goin' to cut them all out, the whole thundering hypocritical gang of them."

"And run away? My uncle's just told me all about it, you know."

"Oh, I'd 'a' guessed that, all right. Trust one o' them to gab! That's what started the whole rumpus. Yes, I'm goin' to leave the town."

"No, you're not," said John. "Sit down."

Newton perched upon the edge of the metal-covered trunk, the clothes falling to the rag-carpeted floor. John sat on the bed.

"Now don't be such a fool, Newton," he said. "Look here, I'll tell you what happened to me, and then you can judge for yourself what you ought to do. I came to this place and my uncle got me a job on a paper. He'd told a fellow all about me, and that finally got me fired. Then he was sorry and fixed me up in the bank—this time without telling them. Well, I had a fight with him just now when I found out that he wasn't willing to treat you in the same way. So I've left there—going to send for the rest of my

things to-morrow. But I won't leave this town. I won't say I'm licked. I didn't when I lost my first job, and I don't see why you should."

Newton, however, was defiant.

"Oh," he began, "what in thunder's the use? These black parsons will pat you on the back when you're jailed because that's their business, but once you're out they won't touch you—they won't look at you the minute they're on. I'm sick of 'em, I tell you, the whole mob. I'm known here now, but I'll have a little chance some'eres else, an' I'm goin' there. What's the odds? They can't do no more 'an send me up again."

"You don't mean that you're going back to the old line—to grafting again?"

There are distinctions in the ancient profession. Newton turned up his nose at the term which John had been at such pains to use.

"Grafting?" he said contemptuously. "What do you think I am, anyhow? A reg'lar gun? No, sir, my line's gopher-work."

"What's that?"

"Crackin' peters—bustin' safes."

John smiled in spite of himself.

"But you're not going to take that up again, are you?" he asked.

"Why, cert'n'y. I got to live, I guess, just as much as them gospel-preachers. An' I don't consider I owe a single one o' th' jays a single thing. There's nothin' too rotten for me to do to them and, by God, I'll be square with the whole shootin'-match before I get through with it—you can just bet your sweet life on that."

John was speedily regaining his former mood. He laughed.

"Stuff!" he said. "You've got it in for one man—or only two or three at most—and so you want to take it out of the whole class." It was so easy for him then to be logical! "But, anyhow," he continued, "how do you think you can do it? You can't, you know, and that's flat. You told me yourself that you'd like as not be recognised anywhere, and that your record was against you. Why, Newton, you've got to be straight whether you want to be or not!"

"Oh, it's easy enough to talk!" protested Newton.

"Well, it'll be harder for you to do anything but what I tell you to. Isn't that right?"

"There'd be heavy chances, but I've got to live, I say."

"Sure you do, but so do I, and I'm doing it. Look here. Not so many people are on to you in this town—not as many as are on to me. I'll see that you get a job somewhere or other and sooner or later. In the meantime, you bunk with me. Will you do it?"

He would have put out his hand only that he had a genuine horror of appearing sentimental among men. But Newton understood. He looked up at Haig with a light in his face that the latter had never seen there before, a glimmer which Newton strove at once to hide by a half-return to his earlier tone.

"Yes, I will," he almost savagely assented. "But I want you to understand. It's this way: I'm out of the thing because I'm afraid to go back to it just now, and that's

the only reason. I'll be straight enough, I guess, but I tell you right now it's not because I've any use for these black gospel-sharks. See?"

John looked at him and smiled again. He was anxious to welcome any glow of real courage in the fellow, however perverted.

"That's all right," he said. His own mood, never deeply religious, though once highly if falsely ethical, was ready to join, in a measure, such a revolt, and he then and there quietly dismissed the question of religion from his thoughts forever. The moments of ultimate acceptance or rejection in matters of faith generally come to us all in so subtle a form that we are only semi-conscious of their presence and almost ignorant of their result. "I'm not much on that game myself," John admitted. "But, as you say, we've got to live, and it seems to be the right thing to live square. Now, I need a place to sleep in as much as you do. However, I'm afraid it will have to be more up-town than this for me. Get those things into your trunk and come help look."

Newton complied readily enough at last, and after some search in the better portion of the town they secured an abiding-place in the house of a tall, raw-boned woman with a red face, a beak nose, and glistening eye-glasses, who assured them that she and her husband, Mr. Ebbit, took only a few lodgers, and that but because they had only one child and could not use the whole house.

In the midst of her tale about her ancestry and social connections Haig finally got her out of the way, and found the place to his satisfaction: two rooms, opening the one from the other, outrageously furnished, to be sure, and hung with framed prints that had first appeared as supplements to some Sunday newspaper, but bright, airy, and with possibilities for comfort.

In these rooms the pair managed to live for several days. John attended as usual to his duties at the bank, saw Phyllis whenever he was able, and was, all in all, rather pleased with his present situation. He tried, but with little success, to find some sort of work for Newton, and the latter spent his

days in answering want advertisements and his nights in reading the papers. The man was rough and taciturn, but cleanly, and, in his stiff way, sincerely grateful.

Haig had, indeed, cause for happiness. He was in love with a beautiful girl who loved him in return, and he was seeing just enough of her. He passed through all the stages common to his disease save those of doubt and jealousy. He never mistrusted her affection, never thought but that he was as much to her as she to him.

And to him she was everything. The parting kisses of her clinging lips were with him as warm as at the moment of their giving, until their memory was erased by the renewing of the actual caress. Each meeting was dearer than the last. To him they two seemed together to be travelling continuously towards an ultimate and ideal unity whereof each stage appeared as the goal, only to give place to the surprise of a yet more convincing succession.

He had known, practically, no other woman. To him Phyllis Gwynne was not only

a woman: she was woman, the first and the last, the alpha and omega of emotion. He had been so lonely when he met her, he was —little as he questioned it—so even more than lonely now. His whole nature was a tarnished flower full open, reaching impotently, but not vainly, upward for the dew. He wanted, he yearned for, what all men want and yearn for, and what only the happy few are destined ever to obtain—the Woman Who Understands. He had found her, he was sure, the fated one in all the stretch of time, so perfectly that only one, that crass words were needless, were indeed now malapropos in the search for a definition, and would soon be in the nature of an insult to the foreordained event. Thus it was that, when the rare occasion arose, he convinced himself that he need be in no haste to tell her of himself and his past. He went to her again and again with the words upon his lips, and when, as always, they faltered and were dumb, he soothed his soul with the assurance that she knew and loved him, and that this was enough, since love was a spirit-

ual thing beyond the necessity of the material agency of articulation.

He was thrilling with the tender memory of his latest parting and the consequent promise of a speedy meeting for the tardy night when, on a particular morning some days later, he chanced, on looking up from his now speeding work at the bank, to notice a stranger whom Mr. Drake, the cashier, was apparently showing through the place.

The guest was a short, wiry, fox-faced little man, with dark skin, quiet clothes, and a quick, sharp glance that caught Haig's and flashed, it seemed, into instant recognition. He tossed a word to his guide, and made at once for John's desk with outstretched hand and a smile which the clerk, feeling sure that he had never before seen the fellow, instinctively mistrusted.

"How d' 'e do?" chirruped the stranger.

John had removed his shade, and as he looked up the light from the desk-lamp fell full upon his face. He saw that the person who addressed him was studying him keenly,

and, he never knew why, he kept his pen in his hand.

"I beg your pardon?" he asked.

The fox-faced man never removed his eyes from the face of his interlocutor. He was so unnaturally unembarrassed that John annoyedly felt his hand fall to trembling, and noticed a drop of ink splash on the immaculate page of the great ledger before him.

"Don't you remember me?" responded the stranger.

The tone of civility was a shade overdone.

"I think you've made a mistake," said John, coldly enough. He was delighted to find that his stupid nervousness had not extended to his voice, and so he made to turn firmly to his work. In so doing, however, he caught a look of surprise in the coachman-like face of Mr. Drake and hesitated.

"Why, I'm Jim Tout, and aren't you Tom Bigelow?" asked his persecutor.

"No," replied Haig, with all the dryness which he could assume, "that is not my name."

Mr. Tout appeared to be politely nonplused, but not enough so to discontinue his scrutiny.

"Oh!" he apologized, "I beg *your* pardon. Most remarkable resemblance I ever saw in my life, most remarkable! I took you for a man I used to know in Chicago fifteen years ago."

He retreated at last, obscured by a bountiful shower of similar commonplaces, similarly unsatisfactory, and keeping his eyes wide open to the last.

Haig took up his eraser, both puzzled and distressed. He had not yet been able to quiet himself for a fool when, not five minutes later, one of the bank messengers touched him on the arm and he jumped spasmodically clear of his high stool.

"Mr. Drake wants you in his office, Mr. Haig."

John mentally paralleled this summons with his last into the presence of Bishop Osgood, and the likeness did not soothe his nerves. He hurried, nevertheless, to the ground-glass door in the partition which

separated the shrine of the cashier from the outer temple of the counting-room and pushed it open. As he did so he stepped upon a rubber mat which rang out a peal of electric bells that he had once known, but had now so far forgotten as to be frightened by.

Drake, fat, pasty-faced, and red chop-whiskered, sat at his mahogany desk, and by him sat Mr. Parton, the president, a giant with the severe countenance of a Roman senator. Haig had somehow expected to find the inquisitive Tout there, but he was nowhere to be seen. The cashier majestically motioned his obedient clerk to a stiff, high-backed chair.

There was a pause, during which Drake looked solemn inquiry at his superior. Parton, however, only nodded grimly, and the cashier was compelled to seek a temporary refuge by ostentatiously clearing his throat.

"Mr. Haig," he at last began, "I—that is, we—have a very unpleasant thing to say to you. You are most satisfactory here so far as your work is concerned, and you know,

for that matter, that I have even spoken to you about—about——"

He looked appealingly again at the president.

"Oh, nonsense, Drake, nonsense!" broke in Parton sharply. "He's all right that way, of course, but what's the use of beginning there?—Mr. Haig"—he turned upon the clerk—"there has just been here a bank-detective who says he's sure you're the Haig he knows of who has served a term in jail for embezzlement. Have you or haven't you?"

John rose sharply to his feet. An instant and he blazed defiance; the next and the grip of the world had choked the protests out of him and had tossed him limply back into his seat.

Drake was the breed of dog whose only victims are wounded birds. He pounced upon this one.

"Come, come, Mr. Haig," he sharply echoed, "have you or haven't you?"

John made every effort to regain his self-control. He clutched at the memory of his

interview with Gwynne, but he was no longer the same man. The room swam about him and his head sank. He could not utter a single word, and it seemed hours before either of his tormentors spoke.

"Oh, well!" said Drake at last—and a furtive glance told Haig that Parton, with broad back turned, was closely examining the wide expanse of ground-glass door—"oh, well! This is an admission, I suppose. Anyhow, Tout knows his business; the name's the same; he never mistakes a face, and he declares your picture's in the Rogues' Gallery."

John looked up in a new horror.

"In the——" he began to repeat. But the terrible novelty of the thought was too much for him, and with the harrowing groan of a beaten man he let his face fall to hiding between his hands.

"So, you see, you'll have to go," continued Drake. "We can't have people here whose picture's——"

"Shut up!"

It was Parton who had spoken. He had

wheeled about with genuine anger in his boisterous voice.

"Don't be such a brute, Drake," he continued more quietly, but none the less earnestly. "You never did know anything but dollars and cents. Suppose you leave me to end this."

He waited until the door had closed upon the cashier, and then—

"I'm quite as sorry about all this as you can be, my man," he said with well-meant patronage. "I can't conceive what your uncle could have been about, I can't, indeed."

John wanted to interfere in the bishop's behalf, but he seemed to be listening in a dream wherein the president's voice just reached him from a distance over which he could not hope to reply. It monotonously ran on:

"This thing is, of course, a purely formal precaution. I've no doubt in the world but that you're perfectly all right now—only, business safety depends entirely upon just such precautions as these, and you must see for yourself that we couldn't afford to have

you, just as Mr. Drake tried to say, about here. That sort of protection is the whole foundation of safe business principle, and, much as I'd like to keep you, there's no room for personal feeling, or sympathy, or—or anything of that kind where there's money concerned. There's nothing in the world so touchy or delicate as money. Now, anything else that I can do for you, I'd be glad to do, and if I can give you a recommendation anywhere—anywhere at all—I'll be only too glad to do it."

He paused, and John at length found trembling words.

"Thank you," he said, "but I don't see how I could ask you. The only thing you can do for me now is to have the boy get my things so I can—get—out of here—without—going into the other room."

XIX

"SOMETHING TO DO"

THE Rogues' Gallery! That was the thought that stung. He had forgotten, in his optimistic ignorance, that such a thing existed. Now, his revolted imagination easily conjured up for him something far worse than the reality. He, his father's son, was posted there, then, catalogued and docketed, with a printed narrative of his crime; his face, said once to be so like that of the mother whom he had never seen, was hung in a public place for every vulgar eye to gaze upon and revile, displayed in every city in the land as that of one of the vultures against whom the watchers beside this dead corpse, Society, must beware. It would be seen and remembered and recognised together with that of the latest-caught "confidence-man." It had been recognised. It was there for

that. Oh, no doubt, he thought, life being what it was, the watchers were right enough to stand him also in their Toussaud-chamber of living horrors! Even Haig's jaundiced brain must admit so much. But his life need never have been what it was. Admitting the inevitability of an unfriended boy's dazzled misstep, it still remained true that, had not Fate—marvellously disguised in the person of a weak and shallow cleric—imposed upon his shame and ignorance with the most clumsily marked cards, he could have compromised with wrong and escaped all this. He could have held up his head among men had he but shut his ears against the pitiless logic of right.

The injustice of it! Again and again, until his heart grew sick and his head throbbed to bursting, he went over, as he skulked through the back streets homeward, the rebellious litany of despair. They had demanded the price decreed by the ages, and he had paid it with ten sweating years of his life—for what?

But, in the face of the necessity for daily

bread, even the mood of revolt could not last long. With the shock of a sincere surprise, it came suddenly back to him that he had now no means of support. It was characteristic of the man that this should be one of the last thoughts to occur to him, yet, having arisen, it was equally characteristic that he should find that there was no laying it. He must get work of some sort and that right soon. There had been, of course, one or two tentative advances from his aunt, but, for all his wretchedness, go back as a pensioner upon the bishop, John as yet would not. Nor could he accept the nauseating though well-meant patronage of the bank president. These two and one other shred of self-esteem he found that he had managed to retain; he would not seek out Gwynne as the broken thing of the politician's Delphic prophecy; he would demand a position when he did seek him, but he would seek him only in the rôle of a man who was even then earning honestly his own sustenance. To these tatters of honour he clung wildly. Nay, he even proceeded unconsciously to weave a whole false cloak of

them and to wrap it, with all the violence of the poor and proud, about his shivering soul.

So completely, however, was he shattered by this latest blow of fate that, until the greater fear of meeting a more exacting acquaintance drove him into the house, he dreaded to face Newton. But Newton, he was relieved to find, was out, and he lay down upon the bed, every nerve shriekingly taut.

When his room-mate did come in it was as one wearied from vain seeking. To Haig he appeared more than commonly worn out. He looked, indeed, like a man who had come to the end of his string and who knew it. His face was pale and lined. The mouth drooped, the lips were tired lips; the cheeks were flabby, the eyes a slow despair. There was no need for him to say that his quest had again proved fruitless.

He sank dejectedly into a chair and Haig, thinking to offer such comfort as is to be had of common suffering, sketched briefly his own case at the bank. To his surprise Newton's face never relaxed its calm.

"So you see," John endeavoured cheerily to conclude, "I've got to begin on the same way you're travelling."

"Then God help you," growled Newton.

But his words were far stronger than his tone, which was a mere perfunctory expression of his mental inertia.

"But what do you think of it?" persisted John. He was determined to rouse the man, and for some reason this accomplished the end desired.

Newton banged the arm of his chair.

"Think of it?" he repeated. "Why, I've been expecting it! I'm only just surprised it's taken so long."

"You say that you've been expecting it?"

Newton broke forth madly.

"Sure!" he cried. "What else? They say we're different from other men, and they try to prove it with a tape-measure. I tell you I'm as much a man as any of them! They won't let us be crooked and they won't have us straight. What do they want us to do? Jump in the river? Why don't they give's a life-term for everything, or string

us up like they used to do, and be done with it? God A'mighty, you were out of it 'cause you had a pull—oh, you didn't think so, but you had—but I tell you there 're things goes on in every jail—an' the keepers knows it, all right—as makes it no use—just no use—for any one after he gets out! Do? I'll tell you what we'll do, we'll either go back to jail or we'll starve!"

John tried to laugh, but failed. In the moment he selfishly saw that his own plight was even worse than Newton's, and vaguely indicated its complicating factor.

Immediately with the confession came temporary relief.

"Of course," he said, "the realization of her sympathy is a lot to me, and with all the universe against us she and I stand alone, but perfectly safe behind the wall of our love. She's—she's the Woman Who Understands."

Newton had followed most of the harangue but lamely. Now, however, he looked keenly at the speaker.

"Does she?" he asked.

"Well, she would, if she knew," Haig con-

fusedly explained. "I must at last tell her, of course. I can tell her everything easily then."

With a great joy he looked from his weakness to lay his bloody head upon the firm bosom of her kindly strength. Even now he thought that, leaping space, the exultant fact of their relations sufficed beyond the capabilities of cruder vehicles to make her feel it all. She was there—there—with pulses beating in tune to his own, shielding him with gracious gesture beneath the great, soft, all-sheltering mantle of her love.

He was certain of this, and yet he could not tell Newton. He feared but tried to get the man's opinion, and, failing to make him speak a word, he conceded so much as to write to her that he had been called out of town—to remain, as a matter of fact, until he had caught, in town, that awful jack-o'-lantern, Something-To-Do. Here was a concession to the material. No matter, it was but temporary. Meanwhile, it was just his certainty of her that enabled him to write the note, and he did write it with the satisfying

subconscious assurance that it was she alone who so bound him to his older and higher ideals of life as to make it possible now to take up weary arms again and renew the losing battle here, in this city, on the same grim ground.

The letter once mailed, he returned with hope high.

"I'm not ready to starve quite yet," he said. "Let's see the papers."

Newton tossed him an armful.

"Wish you luck," he muttered. "I've been to every place there."

"Hum," grunted Haig, running through the columns with an eye practised from his ledgers. "They don't seem to want any book-keepers to-day, that's a fact."

Nor did they the next day, nor the next. They seemed, indeed, to want nothing that was, as he put it, in his line. He bought all the papers and followed the want advertisements more and more carefully. Then he awoke to the sense that he must simply extend his line, must take, in a word, whatever he could get. Thus, after a study of the

closely printed pages, he would start out every morning to answer all that offered.

Newton would hopelessly go over the papers with him, and they would divide the city into halves, spending their evenings in writing to such advertisers as concealed their identity, or otherwise required a letter. But gradually Haig became impressed with the feeling that his companion's search was being conducted perfunctorily, and merely as a concession to his benefactor's feelings. The man was quite hopeless, and was, despite his rough attempts at kindness, of too simple a nature to conceal it. He was obviously studying John's mood and making a tremendous effort to accommodate himself thereto. He was willing to a degree which at times became oppressive; he spared himself nothing in his endeavours, but, though John felt all this to a point that aroused him to real friendship, he saw also the underlying conviction of his more experienced fellow, and the contagion spread gradually to his own soul.

It was a season of hard times, and bona

fide positions were rare. At hand there were to be had ten men for every one place, and small need was there to advertise for applicants. But — beamers, cutters, machine-hands, paper-hangers, salesmen—the two outcasts went doggedly through the weary lists from A to Z. One thing only they came to rule out—all calls for canvassers. These positions John found generally wanted solicitors for books which could never sell, and many a vague but promising advertisement ended in the rickety "office" of some sub-agent for such a publication.

Yet Haig gritted his teeth and kept on. He resolved not to see Phyllis until he had something—anything now so that it was something—to do, and to this determination, together with those concerning Gwynne and the bishop, he managed still to adhere. The very soreness of his straits had lent to his weakened character a hate of the world, and an oath to force from it its debt of daily bread which, added to his secure faith in his sweetheart, served the want of more substantial resolve.

Yet for whatever positions he found open he could not qualify. The demand, such as it was, was all for skilled labour, and so things went with the castaways from bad to worse. They sought to economize first by cutting their rations to two and then to one meal a day, while by hard degrees, John descended the scale until he would have gone for a stable-boy rather than acknowledge defeat. He would now try anything but surrender.

"Here's something promising," he remarked one morning, as he read:

> "Wanted: Young man for responsible clerical position.
> "Must be neat. Twenty-five dollars a week possible."

"Well," said Newton, "if it's promising it's a liar, that's all."

"Why so?"

"'Cause it ain't possible, that's why. It's another o' them fake book-agents."

"How do you know?"

"Was in last week. I looked it up. You must be forgettin'."

And he was right. In spite of the fact that all want advertisements read so alluringly alike, a little exercise of the memory proved that nearly every one which appeared that day was a repetition of some one which John had hopefully weighed and despairingly found wanting at some time or other during the past ten days. What remained were of a stamp too hopelessly familiar to induce investigation. The next morning it was the same, save that the new ones were still fewer and worse. On the third day there were no new ones at all.

That morning Newton was clumsily nervous. He fidgeted about the room like a caged polar bear in a midsummer circus.

For a while Haig watched him furtively from behind a newspaper. He himself was nervous, and every sudden movement of his companion startled him. He would not yet despair of their situation, but he was growing very tired.

Finally Newton made a little sound of drumming upon the window-pane.

It was the last straw for Haig.

"What the devil's the matter with you?" he broke out.

Newton turned. It was the opening he had been longing for. He was most at home in such moods precisely so interpreted.

"Just that," he said angrily. "Just what you're showin'. Look here, I may be all kinds of a lobster, but I'm not a born sponge, and I won't be one, either. See?"

John saw, and his temper changed to one more generous. But at last Newton had caught his pace and so forbade interruption.

"We've been at this long enough. I ain't a-goin' on livin' on you forever, an' you ought t' know it. I ain't that kind, thank you. Oh, there ain't no use bluffin' no more! I'm on all right. Great thunder, how could I help bein'? Your money can't last forever, an' I'm not a-goin' t' help eat it up. I don't know what you take me for, but I'm no fool, an' I know there ain't nothin' in this huntin' around fer a job, an' you know it, an' I'm goin' t' cut. By the Lord, this time I mean it!"

For answer John tossed him a cigarette

and began with the strongest of masculine arguments.

"Now, don't be a fool, Tom," he said.

"Naw, I won't be, you bet. Ain't that what I'm a-tellin' you?"

John looked into the hot, wicked face, and read the depth of good feeling which the man was trying so hard to conceal beneath his anger. Here at last was the friend he had always felt was sleeping somewhere in the strange caverns of Newton's curious identity.

"Smoke up," he ordered, and as the man, from habit, obeyed, he continued: "I know you mean it all right, but it's no go. Look here, haven't I done my best for you?"

"That's it," cried Newton, "an' I don't thank you for thinkin' I'd keep on lettin' you now. I've done it a sight longer than I ought ter as it is. I ain't no lobster."

"Wait a bit. I have done the best I could, haven't I?"

Newton descended to the sullen stage that always masks the embarrassment of the unemotionally ignorant.

"I tell you I ain't no lobster," he repeated.

"Then you'll do me a favour in return for what little I've been able to do for you." John's voice shook with real earnestness. "Do you think I want—do you think, man, I want to be left alone to face this thing?"

With an unpremeditated gesture he threw open his coat, and Newton's quick eye caught his meaning: his watch was gone.

But Haig had miscalculated by just one point. The sight warmed his fellow again to all the former revolt.

"That's it! That's it!" he reiterated. "I'll not stand for it!"

But Haig was too much in earnest to be daunted. He was frankly moved by just the motives he had indicated. He had found at last a friend—even Phyllis could not, in the present crisis, be that to him—and that he could not afford to lose at the very summit of misfortune. Least of all could he bear, from blank fear of the moral effect upon his

own forces, the sight of his ally flying from the battle.

He walked to the window and put his two tremulous hands on the man's heaving shoulders.

"Tom," he said, "I want you by me. Don't run away now. You've got to stay to help me out."

Newton's eyes showed suspicion of this logic.

"No," he muttered.

"But you've got to."

"No."

"Please, Tom."

"No."

But this time the negative was fainter; the man was wavering.

Hotly John pressed his advantage.

"You must," he insisted. "I wouldn't go back on you like this. If you'd asked me, I'd have done it for you."

Newton looked hard at the floor.

"How much you got?" he finally asked.

"Oh, that's all right!"

"How much?"

"Fifteen dollars. But listen. That'll pay our way out of here and into a—a cheaper place, and I'll make the effort of my life for the rest of the week. I'll take anything, as you know—for my own sake. Let me have just till the end of the week, and if I don't get anything by that time I won't ask you to stay. Or just wait for to-day, Tom; I—I need you."

Newton listened with knotted forehead, but the final appeal won the day for Haig.

"All right," he at last mumbled, and John, laughing, flung on an overcoat and dashed out.

In three hours he returned. He had found a place, he said, and, upon being pressed, he added that, after soliciting almost from door to door, he had secured employment as a clerk in a poor grocery-shop far down town. But Newton's ideas of work had always been too vague, and had lately been too dulled, to draw any fine distinctions of grade. He accepted calmly, therefore, the invitation that went with Haig's announcement, especially as John insisted that he

would soon be able to find a position for his friend in the same shop. They made ready immediately for a move to cheaper quarters, and, once this was accomplished, Haig allowed himself his reward: he set out to find Phyllis.

XX

CROSS-PURPOSES

At last John's plans were definite. After all the weary waiting the doubts were disproved which he could at last confess to having harboured; the battle was won. He was to get, it was true, the splendid sum of five dollars a week, but that was not the point. The point was that he should at last earn some money, however little. He had exalted above all other ideals the respectability of the wage-earner. To that he had pinned his new conceptions of self-esteem, and because of that he could now, at the end of a week, go to Gwynne and make his contemplated demands for some sort of substantial political preferment.

Again he was walking upon the air. During his season of misfortune he had severely allowed that single letter which he had writ-

ten at its beginning to cut him off from all sight of Phyllis, and an unformed sense of chivalry, added to a strange new pride in imposing upon him the feeling that he must not, even by further writing, intrude his sorrows upon her while his foot was still sore from the tread of the black ox. But nothing could prevent his living all the while upon the thought of her just as, in jail, he had once, and for so much longer, lived upon the vain thought of atonement. Now, while winter was at its height in all the world about him, the spring of hope blossomed swiftly in his heart towards the full-blown summer of certainty. He could explain easily enough his long silence; indeed, his parting note had, he reflected, sufficiently prepared her for the explanation. The one thing that troubled him was the chance of finding her just then at home.

But at first he felt that chance was now consistently favouring him. As, with swelling impatience, he neared the house, he saw some persons being shown out. He paused until they had half-descended the steps, and

then, unable longer to keep the leash upon his emotions, he hurried past them, brushed by the startled servant, and stepped into the deep-coloured reception-room where he had first met her.

She was just about to leave it, was standing alone in the full glare of the lights from the big chandelier, clad again in that gown of filmy blue, and regarding him with great, startled eyes that, as he rushed forward, let fly, nevertheless, a challenge which arrested him midway.

"Phyllis!" he cried.

She looked at him steadily. Then her eyes closed and she swayed a little, but, as he thereupon once more stepped forward, a firm hand waved him gently back. She spoke one word, in a strange, abstracted voice, an empty echo of her once familiar tones, new and far away.

"Well?" she asked, and again, as he in turn hesitated and grasped at the frail support of a gilded chair, "Well?"

For the first time in his life terror laid hold of Haig and mastered him. He was

throttled in the sudden and relentless gasp of his vague appreciation of all that had happened. He could not think; he knew only that he was face to face with his ultimate tragedy, and that he was afraid of it—afraid.

Woman-like, however, Phyllis was about to begin with her lesser complaint.

"This is rather unexpected," she said with that nervous coldness which her sex invariably employs to disguise its greatest warmth. "You return, it seems, even more suddenly than you go."

The minor difficulty John welcomed as a genuine escape from the greater.

"But, Phyllis," he protested, "I wrote you before I left; I explained that I had to go."

"Yes," she replied with closely studied emphasis. "You wrote—before you went."

"Oh!" he cried with a sadly miscalculated relief, "was that it?" Then, on the instant, he saw in her face the failure of this feint, and, his ignorance of woman preventing him from guessing why it had failed, he blindly

continued: "But, my dear, I couldn't write again, I couldn't, really."

In vain. He paused, and as her eyes still hardened there fled from him once more all his resolutions towards detailed disclosure. There was, even he could see, only the paramount necessity of present reconciliation. Everything else could wait—nay, must wait—upon that. In full panic he lunged wildly, seeking the weakness that there must, he felt, be somewhere in her guard:

"Oh, Phyllis, I beg you to believe me in this! I can't explain just yet—there are several things that I must explain some day soon—but I can't explain them now. I can only promise you that they are things that you will understand easily enough then, and I ask you, dear, ask you to love me still and to trust me this once."

For another moment she looked steadily at him, looked at him with a glance which cut deep into his breast. But—

"No," she said. "I've had enough of trusting."

Again that bewildering sword-play of attack.

"What do you mean?" he appealed to her in dazzled agony. "Have I ever asked you to trust me? Have I, ever since I first knew you"—it seemed so long!—"put you to this or any test? Tell me, have I?"

"Test?" she repeated in fine scorn. "Is there—has there ever been any need of that? What cause has there ever been for any test—of me?"

Hopelessly he admitted to himself that he had been too precipitate; despairingly he attempted calmly to gather all his force for the more logical method of advance.

"But, Phyllis," he insisted, "can't you see that this is really all simply absurd? You know me; you know that I love you. Why, then, do you refuse to trust me in so entirely simple an affair?"

She was twisting between her white hands that same frail bit of a fan.

"That's it," she answered, steadily regarding her play. "Do I know you? That's

just it, you see. Oh!"—a woman to the last, she broke away from the abstractions into a passionate appeal to the concrete—"Do you realize to what you have subjected me? Do you realize it? You couldn't ask me this if you did—not even you!" She flashed it at him angrily, and, as her glance comprehended his blank stare: "But you don't, I see," she said amazedly. "You don't. I wonder how you could have failed to count upon this, but it seems that you somehow haven't. Well"—she finally let him have it—"what are these horrible lies they are telling about you?"

Then he realized it easily enough. Here also the truth was to confront him. His hesitation, his cowardly delay—yes, he could see now that it was cowardly!—had lost him this last chance of defeating the prejudice of the world.

But, upon the coming of certainty, terror fled. He had a horror of the unknown, the tangible he would fight upon any ground. Shame for his deception was against him, but the hurt of that was speedily overthrown in

the exaltation, in the real glory of defeat courageously met and borne.

He paused an instant only, but in that pause her face, though he was now wholly unable to read it, passed from anger to sorrow, and when she broke the silence, ere words came to him, it was with a last forlorn appeal to hope.

"Well," she repeated, broken on the wheel of her contending emotions, "what are these horrible lies?"

Understanding made him cautious; he wished to confirm it to a certainty.

"They have told you," he asked now steadily enough, "just what?"

Her head in her hands, she sank upon a near-by ottoman. She could not face him with the accusations because she loved him, and so feared that she might read confession in his gaze.

There was another silence.

At length Haig repeated his question.

"Why," she then said, still shutting out all sight of him, "they are all talking about you. They gloat over it because the bishop

is your uncle and he brought you here. They say you've been a criminal. I have had to stay here and listen to it all—all—and you God knew where! There is nothing they haven't said. Oh, John, they have even said you'd—you'd been in jail!"

He made towards her, but she would not suffer him until he had replied. His face was so calm, his jaw so squared, that, now she dared a look, she saw in him only righteous anger, and ventured again to vent her nervousness upon her fan, sitting very straight, but very white, upon the ottoman.

John paused, then, full before her, and answered with his eyes squarely upon her face.

"They said I'd been a criminal, did they, and that I'd been in jail?"

She nodded gravely. The words sounded worse, if that were possible, from his lips than from hers.

"Well," he said, "those were not lies."

He watched her pitilessly. Her mouth tightened a little as if from physical pain.

The fan broke in two pieces and one fell on the floor. He waited, but she did not speak. She did not even sob. She only looked at him, through him, past him. Pride might be much, right might be much, but for the moment love was more than either. He bore it as long as he could, and then gave way to the old terror of it all.

He ran upon her, calling her name and grasping her hand, but she sprang up and aside, tearing her hand away with a shiver of loathing and a look that he could not this time misinterpret. He forgot at once the last retreating glimmer of his deception, and dealt only with the hardness of his own estate.

"Why? Why?" he cried out to her. "What have I done to deserve this? I went wrong. I stole money. I admit that—all of it. But I could have got away from the consequences if I'd wanted to. Instead, I was sorry for what I'd done. I took all the medicine, every drop of it. I was ready to receive the punishment that they'd fixed on as the right one. I took it, I say. I served ten years. Do you

hear me? Ten years! Do you know what that means? Ten years—the best ones—out of my life, ten years at hard work, deservedly, with thugs and murderers for my neighbours and companions. Well, I was kept up by just one thing: by my resolve to accept the punishment to the bitter end just so that I could do right, just so that I could come out a clean man and make a fresh start. I might have lied and cringed and I'd never have had to go to jail at all, but I wanted to be square —to be squared. And what have they done for me in return? One man, who's worse than I ever was, tells me he's better than I am because he's never had the honest courage to face his wrong; a second, who was a liar and a cheat, fires me from the paper because I'd done what I ought to do; another won't allow me in his bank because I've obeyed the same code of laws that makes it possible for him to have a bank! Even the man who taught me all and brought it all upon me—even he turns me out of his house because I've adhered to the teachings of him and his Church! Are you going to be like the rest?

You know me better than any of them. Are you going to turn from me, too?"

He ended in a voice broken by sobs of self-pity, but Phyllis, though above her corsage her vivid breast was heaving, remained, true to her blood and breeding, dry-eyed to the end.

"I didn't know you!" she replied. "It's just as I thought. I didn't know you. Square? Do you call it square or high-minded to deceive me the way you've done? Was that in line with all the fine things you've just been ascribing to yourself? Why, your whole acquaintance with me has been one black lie from beginning to end!"

But John was more seriously poisoned by the weeds of the world than he had guessed. He rose, hat in hand.

"It's not that," he said slowly. "You could easily see how I'd hesitate about telling you, and you must know that I'd have told you some day. But it's not that. It's not that I haven't told you. You wouldn't have let me near you in the start if I had.

It's that I was in jail. You're just like the rest."

"Whether I'd have let you go on if you'd told me in time!" she returned. "That's nothing to do with it. It was your plain duty to tell me, happen what might to yourself. But instead everybody in the world seems to have known it before I did."

"Yes," he said, turning to go. "'Everybody knew.' That's it. But there's more than even that," he added bitterly from the shadow of the doorway. "There's just what I said there was. You may think it's because I didn't tell you. But it's really all because, to right what was wrong, I've done what was right. It's because I've been in jail."

XXI

THE KISS OF DEATH

His insensible fears had been right; this was, indeed, the ultimate tragedy.

He left her house crushed by the ordeal. Unconsciously, he found, he had been keeping in his heart one little corner consecrated to his earlier ethical convictions. Now the high priestess had forsaken the shrine.

He went back to his new lodging, a miserable, sloping-roofed, brick-walled garret in the roughest quarter of the city, and, for the second time in the past few weeks, was relieved to find Newton absent. He sat down on the low edge of his ramshackle bed and tried hard to think it over.

Logical thought, however, was slow in coming. He was sensible of only one feeling: the desire to run away. This last blow, he believed, had torn asunder the weak life-

raft on which he had escaped from the wreck of his manhood. He had no longer any desire to live. He wanted only to crawl into some hole—into any corner—and hide. But even that, he bitterly realized, required money—without money a man might not decently even die—and he had now next to nothing. For the nonce only the coward was left in him. With the faith of Phyllis he felt that he could easily have fought on; without it he simply ceased to care. One thing alone was left him—the false pride, born of insane hatred, that forbade an appeal to Gwynne. Yet the bishop was left, and, upon the thought, his debased soul drove him to his uncle's door.

The servant was palpably embarrassed.

"I'm very sorry, Mr. Haig," he apologized, "but Dr. Osgood isn't in."

"Nor my aunt?"

"Nor Mrs. Osgood, sir."

"Well, where is my uncle, and when will he be back?"

The servant collapsed.

"Oh, Mr. John," he began, "you've al-

ways been kind to me, but it's orders, sir, positive orders this very day, and as much as me job's worth, sir!"

Haig turned away with a bitter heart. It was not so much that he had so lowered himself as that he should have been so patently expected to do it. But there again arose his pride. Very well, he could wait. Tramp he would not. He could wait a month or two —a year, if necessary. By that time he could surely have saved his fare elsewhere, and then he might somehow get into another land.

He went to bed, but not to sleep, and was broad awake when, with the first gleam of the daylight, Newton entered.

"You're late," John ventured, seeing that some word was expected of him.

Newton slouched into a corner and there deposited a great bundle that he had just been able to get under his arm.

"Got a job," he elucidated, "an' started right in on it."

"What is it?"

"Night-watchman in a factory up-town. You've got to let me pay off what I owe you

in a day or two. But I'll tell you all about the job in the morning."

The explanation was destined, however, never to be forthcoming, for John was at last too sleepy just then to insist, and was up early next morning to begin his new work at the store. Thereafter, as their hours so varied, and as Tom never again referred to his business, his companion, half-respectfully, asked no questions.

He went about his work with a bold desperation which he welcomed for courage. He stood behind the grimy counter in the low-ceilinged shop and shovelled into the scales, for slatternly women and ragged children of all colours, sugar, coffee, and rice, in the smallest imaginable quantities at the smallest imaginable price. This from seven in the morning until close upon midnight. There were times when he welcomed the hard work if only for the few hours of quiet sleep which it was at last certain to insure.

Of Newton he saw less and less. The man was generally in bed when he got up, and never returned until long after John was

wrapped in slumber, and for several days the only long conversation between them was one in which they nearly came to blows over Haig's refusal to consider Newton in his debt.

But the already accustomed order was not long to last. Haig was one day at work in the store when, about noon, Tom entered, flung a copy of the Globe-Express on the counter, pointed a grimy finger to a certain item, and, without a word of comment, retired through the doorway of the shop.

Comment was, indeed, superfluous. John picked up the paper and read the explanation easily enough.

The paragraph was a brief one in the day's summary of society news. It read:

"Announcement is made of the engagement of Miss Phyllis Gwynne to Mr. Marsden Payne. Miss Gwynne is one of the most charming of this season's débutantes, and the first to fall captive to the wiles of the little god. She is the daughter and only child of William Stuyvesant Logan Gwynne. Mr. Payne is also a member of one of the city's

best-known families, and is a man of independent fortune."

John laid down the paper and turned from its vulgar phrasing to measure five cents' worth of tea for a fat negress. He was pleased to note that his hand was quite steady.

It remained so all day. He worked hard, but in a dream, and when he went home he was tired out—too tired to be able to rouse himself to the unreasonable torture which he knew was awaiting the return of a clearer consciousness.

It was bitter cold, a night in early February, when the winter, as if angered by its enforced tardiness, had settled calmly down to do its worst. Haig's teeth were chattering as he entered the garret. The sloping roof allowed of an upright position along but one side of the room. There stood his camp-bed. Newton had insisted upon sleeping at the other side by the draughty bit of a window let into the bare bricks close to the floor, where he had to take his clothes off while in a sitting posture. His own clothes John was

just then too tired to take off at all. He would rest awhile, he said, and undress later. He rolled up his shabby coat and placed it by the window to protect Newton, when he should turn in, from the air that swept through the crazy frame. Then he drew the blanket about him, blew out the ill-smelling lamp that stood on the floor by his pillow, and, before he knew it, had fallen into an uneasy doze.

He was awakened by the cold. The first suspicion of morning light was already frostily quivering through the garret, but so uncertainly that he was more confused than if he had opened his eyes upon complete darkness. He could just make out that Newton's bed was still empty, and he was vaguely worried. He was chilled to the bone and hungry, but too sleepy to get up.

For some time he lay thus. Then there was a sound of footsteps on the perilous stairs. The sounds were hurried and uncertain; strange, too, they seemed, and cautious. He lay with half-closed eyes, tensely alarmed.

The door opened and a figure stole in. It

was an unfamiliar, wilted sort of a figure, bent double and breathing hard. But he knew it for Tom's. It took a tip-toeing step into the room, paused, turned, bolted the door, and then dragged itself towards the bed with a strange shambling movement. Haig concluded that Newton must be drunk.

John had never seen him thus before, and understood, therefore, the other's clumsy attempts at getting to bed unobserved. He wondered how often this had happened of late, but he resolved that the etiquette of the under-world would rule against the unfair advantage of even unintentional eavesdropping, and so he lay quiet.

Newton sank upon the cold floor, his head fallen among the scant covers of his mattress. For some time he lay thus, and John was just considering whether or no to get up and undress him when the man began that operation for himself, in an awkward position, slowly and with many groans. Once he cried out, an odd, sharp cry, and again there was a sound as if a shirt were being torn, a bit at a time. At last Newton tumbled over

on the mattress, the operation evidently complete.

There was a long period of silence, broken only by the hard, repressed, but tolerably regular breathing of Newton. John tried to go to sleep once more, but there seemed now to be something that laid its fingers on his eyelids and held them inexorably open. It seemed to him that the room had grown still colder, that some power was keeping the dawn in leash, and, chilly as was the atmosphere, it grew also uncannily oppressive.

"John!"

It was Newton's own voice, thinned a trifle, but so familiar that Haig leaped half out of bed. His heart beat violently, and a dampness broke out upon the palms of his hands. Yet he managed to control his voice.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Light the lamp, please."

Never thinking of the strangeness of the request, he obeyed, and rose expectant of he knew not what.

"Leave it there," continued that odd

voice. "I don't want the light in my eyes, but I want to see you. Come over here and sit down where I can. Look out for your head! That's it. I want to tell you something."

John crawled to the pallet-side and curled up on the bare, rat-eaten floor, shivering with the cold. He sat facing Newton, and could just make out the fellow's features, which seemed peaked more than ever before, and very pale in the half-light of the dawn. Then he glanced at the outline of the figure beneath the light covers and shivered, not from the cold. There was something unnatural about the thing and the way the clothes clung to it.

"Look at me—up here," commanded Newton promptly.

John obeyed, wondering, alarmed.

"What's the trouble?" he asked.

"I'm sick."

John started to rise.

"I'll get a doctor," he said.

"Sit down," said Newton for all reply, and there was that as of some greater knowl-

edge in the way he said it. Only when Haig resumed his former position did the man relax enough from his accustomed surly tone to add: "You won't do anything of the damned kind. No doctors for me."

"But what is the trouble?" John managed to persist.

"I'm done."

"Done?"

"Yes, done—cleaned out—goin' t' hand in my checks—goin' t' croak."

He spoke with an impersonal aloofness such as a hospital surgeon uses of a pauper patient.

Again Haig tried to remonstrate.

"Nonsense," he said. "But if you really feel bad," he added, "you must let me get a doctor."

"Nothin' of th' kind, I tell you. Say, see here; I've done a couple o' little favours for you, haven't I?"

John nodded.

"Well, then, do this for me. I'm tellin' you straight that no doctor could do anythin' for me—an' the less o' one we have about

here the better for both o' us. Gimme your hand."

He stretched out a thin, bloodless palm that looked, in the twilight, queer and new and weak. It was almost a woman's hand—or a child's—but, when John's met it, the supple fingers closed on his like a vise, and held him so tightly that he nearly screamed.

"There," remarked Newton more composedly. "Now if you go you've got to drag me along with you."

"But what's the matter?" cried John for the third time. "What is it?"

"Will you promise not to go for a doctor?"

"Why should I promise?"

"That's why," said Newton, and gave a twist to the arm that made John drive his teeth into his lip to keep from shrieking.

"Oh, I promise!" he wailed.

"On your honour?"

"Yes, yes. Let go!"

Newton dropped the arm and fell back for a moment or two, too weak to speak. At last he muttered:

"I fell and twisted something or other inside of me. I've done it once or twice before, and the doctor himself said he'd be no good next time. So there ain't no use of any medicine now. I know what I'm talkin' about. A man knows, I guess, when it gets to be the real thing. I know better than you, anyhow; it's not you that's croakin', it's me."

Again John shivered.

"Let me go!" he begged.

"No. Didn't you promise me? You've given me your word you wouldn't go, an' now I'll give you mine it wouldn't be no use—not the least. Don't you suppose I'd have you go in a minute if it was?"

"But you might be mistaken; you must be!"

He clung to the desperate hope of it, but Newton was firm with the firmness of the sick.

"Rot!" he snapped. "I guess I know, I tell you. The other doctor said, anyhow, there wasn't anything to do but lay still."

They remained there quiet again for a while. Then—

"Guess you'd better put that light out," said Newton. "Daylight's a-comin'."

It was coming at last, very slowly as yet, but surely, almost implacably. John blew out the lamp with a great blast of steaming breath, and returned to his place at the bed. The pale, cold light stole in through the frosted pane and gradually, gradually, like the remorseless, careful artist that it is, drew the picture of Newton's face upon the pillow.

It was a new face to John, as he had expected, like yet unlike the one which he had known through the worst of his troubles, which had always been, present or remembered, with him in these latter days, rough, but sincere and—he knew it now—loved. But this face was not rough. The coarse lines were softened; they vanished as he looked, and in their place there grew upward another set, a sketch in charcoal and Chinese white, a thin, refined face that might, he thought, have been that of a gentleman, but a face, nevertheless, that bore plainly the vindication of its owner's diagnosis.

Haig watched it fascinated, silent. The great, calm eyes looked back at him from out of deep bluish shadows. They understood him, read him, but they did not waver, and he, for his part, could not shift his gaze.

The man was going to die—this man, whose living hand he held, whom he had known so briefly but so intimately, whom he had caught a glimpse of so short a time ago in the very flower of health. Death was new to John. When his father died far away from him he had felt its touch, but its consummation, and far less its approach, he had never before witnessed. He could not now realize it. He felt that something was expected of him, something sudden, large, melodramatic, but he could not in any way rise to the situation. He was devoured only by an awesome curiosity. What was this presence? How, he wondered, did it feel to die? Must he some day lie thus and wait it, and did all men wait it thus easily? He gripped the bedclothes. He tried to steady himself, to concentrate his thought to action upon some little kindly ministration, but in vain. He

trembled at the blasphemous impudence of his wonder, but he could not check it.

"Give me your hand again," said Newton at last.

John obeyed quaking, and realizing that he feared this thing which was occurring.

"Don't be afraid," Newton smilingly protested in a thin but normal tone. "I won't twist it this time." Then, as they touched hands: "We've been pretty good friends, sort of, haven't we?" he asked.

John nodded with an unfamiliar gravity.

"We're not the same sort," Newton went on, "an' we haven't seen as much of each other as girls would, but we've hit it off pretty well, eh?"

Voice and words were almost cheerful, but in the eyes John caught the fleeting shadow of a timid, questioning love. To his own eyes the tears sprang with a rush of selfish relief. His shoulders shook with the sobs.

"Oh, don't do that," protested Newton, with real feeling. Then, more sharply, "Cut it out, I say," he added, "or I'll just keep quiet."

Haig managed so far to master himself as to check the convulsions, but, as Newton calmly, objectively continued, the tears went on flowing freely and unheeded.

"Men are different from girls, I guess, about them things," Tom reflectively pursued. "They don't somehow feel the same. I b'lieve women show it more an' don't feel it as much. I'll tell you what it is, John, I don't think, when it comes to big things, that women counts."

Haig saw the rude comfort so barely concealed, and acknowledged it with a renewed pressure of his fingers.

"They don't count," repeated Newton wisely. "I've known 'em—lots of 'em—all kinds. I've loved one of 'em. You mightn't b'lieve it, but I have—loved her just as hard as you could. An' I'd have done anythin' to have had her with me any time up t' yesterday, but—I'm givin' it t' you straight, s' help me God, I am—I wouldn't want her now. Girls don't understand an' men do. That's the dif'rence. Women'll laugh a lot or cry a lot—bless 'em!—but they just don't know,

an' what a fellow wants is some one that knows—see? Women don't size up to th' big things, an' I wouldn't trade mine for—say you—to die alongside of."

A slight spasm shot through him and distorted his mouth, but before John could interpose a question he was speaking easily once more.

"Now," he said, "what you want t' do is t' find another friend an' another woman. It may be hard t' find the friend, but there won't be no trouble 'bout the woman. You're a good fellow an' can do it, easy enough. Women like you, an' they're all alike, ev'ry one o' 'em—take my word for it. It's women a man loves, but it ain't so much men that he likes; it's a man.

"I ain't goin' t' talk about how much I'm obliged t' you," he pursued, "for all you've done for me. Don't say No; I ain't a-goin' t' talk about it. What's the good? I tried t' get a graft so's I could help pay it all back, but first you wouldn't let me, an' now I'm up against it with a 'thank you very kindly'—an' that's all. I ain't no hand at preachin',

neither, an' I never did take stock in fellows that got good when they came to croak, but there's one thing I've been thinkin' a hell of a lot about for a good while, an' meant to tell you before. I couldn't then, but somehow things seems different now. It's this: We've thought it was hard lines for 'em t' send us up an' then treat us as if we hadn't squared ourselves. But I've got t' thinkin' the trouble's in us. I believe you may go to jail till you rot, but you ain't square till you're sorry."

A shaft of anæmic sunlight shot its startled way into the room, and Newton sat half-way up in bed.

"There," he said reproachfully, "I'm keepin' you from your work. There was a lot I wanted to say along that line, an' there was something about what I wanted you to do—afterward. But I'm forgettin', an', anyhow, you must get to the store now."

John thrust an arm about his friend—an arm, on the instant, firm enough.

"Why," he protested, "you don't suppose, do you, I'd leave you now?"

"Sure," said Newton cheerfully. "Work's work. It's got to be done whoever lives or dies. You've had a hard enough time gettin' this job. You mustn't lose it now. That old Jew's a screw—an' I guess just at the last a fellow doesn't know whether he's alone or not. Let me lie back again."

"I won't go," said John.

"You must," persisted Newton.

He spoke with vigour, and then, as if consequent upon the effort, as if even in this he wished to serve his friend, the end came suddenly. Another spasm contorted the face. The man struggled again to a sitting posture. He gasped for breath. But he brushed aside impatiently John's proffered support, and, panting loudly, held out his hand.

Haig gripped it.

"Good-bye," said Newton.

John's dry lips moved noiselessly.

Newton tried to smile, but his face was twisted like a gargoyle's. His eyes closed, snapped open, stared. His jaw fell, his knees shot upward beneath the covers. A little line of dark crimson appeared at the pale

corners of his mouth; it overflowed upon his chin. There was a furtive movement of the free hand; the grasp of the other tightened in a sudden mighty clinch that made John yell with pain. And with that cry ringing among the low rafters, Tom Newton collapsed gently, almost slowly, upon his pillow.

However ignorant a man may be of death, he knows it when he sees it, and John, after one moment of suspense, closed the horrid, empty eyes. Then he drew back the blanket to compose the dead man's limbs, and, in so doing, wrenched a rough bandage and disclosed a blue-black bullet-hole in Newton's breast.

XXII

THE GRATITUDE OF KINGS

As he stood there horror-stricken there came loud steps upon the stair and a hurried rattling at the door.

John dropped the blanket like one detected in a murder. Instinctively he shrank into a corner, but, as the rattling continued, he speedily realized that the panels could offer no lasting resistance to attack, and at once strode forward and slipped back the bolt.

"Ricker!" he exclaimed.

"What's left!" panted the nearly exhausted reporter, flashing his teeth in a nervous grin. "I've got bad news for you." He came a step into the room. "What's that?" he cried suddenly, pointing to the thing upon the bed. But then, turning as quickly, "Never mind," he added, "I'd better not know. I'm running enough risks as it is."

"But what's the news?" asked John, once more a-tremble.

"Been doin' police. Early this morning heard a job I thought you might be mixed up in from what they said at the Front, an' been hunting you ever since."

"A job?"

"Sure. Oh, for Heaven's sake don't try a bluff now! You haven't time."

"But what was it?"

"That stiff of a sexton you were mixed up with was recognised robbin' a house—just as I was quittin' work at Central Station the news came in—an' it was Billy Gwynne's house, an' old Gwynne blazed a hole into him. Billy somehow recognised him. He got away, but he left a lot of blood."

"My God!"

John spoke in a slow, toneless bewilderment. He sank into a corner with his face towards the wall.

But Jimmy was in no mood for this.

"Here, here!" he cried, striking Haig sharply upon the back. "This won't do; there ain't time, I tell you! If I can find

where this fellow lived, you can gamble on it the cops can, too."

John turned with a vacant, stupid gaze.

"What shall I do?" he asked mechanically.

"Get out," snapped Ricker succinctly. "Get out right away. Where's your coat? Got any stuff here to leave a track of you?"

His tone at last moved Haig to nervous action. For an instant he was his old self.

"Stand outside," he ordered; and then, as Jimmy, nothing loath, started to obey, he added upon quick second thought, "Here. I guess you'd better not be seen leaving with me. You'd better go. You've done a sight more already than I could have asked of you. I hadn't anything to do with this, but that won't matter as long as it looks as if I had. You've been—you've been a trump. But I can't thank you now—for your own sake. Good-bye."

There was a quick grasping of cold hands, and then Ricker fled.

John hurried about the room, dumped most of his belongings into the rude fire-

place and set a match to them, paused a moment gently to tie a bandage about his dead friend's stiffened jaw and then, with one last quick look at the gruesome result, drew the blanket over the face and ran down the stairs.

But he was not running away. There had burst up in his breast what he knew now to be the last flame for justice. He would make one more appeal to the fates, and by their decision he would abide.

He had been cool enough to thrust into his pocket a document—Gwynne's letter to Elridge that Newton had given him—which, rightly used, might still prove his salvation. Had he had time to reflect, he might not greatly have cared to be saved, but the climax had all been so sudden and so startling as to obliterate the artificial self from his mental tablets and to leave only the primeval instincts in action.

He made straight for Gwynne's office, and not until he had rattled vainly at the door did he realize how young the day still was. But even then he did not hesitate. He went at

once to the house and sent up his own name —"on important business."

He waited an unconscionable time in the familiar reception-room, but the place was so strange and tawdry to him in the morning light, and his present emotions were so strong, that he could scarce recognise and much less associate it in memory with the scenes of his immediate past.

He was pacing the room like a caged lion, filled with every sort of fear, anger, and impatience, when at last he caught a sound in the hallway and turned just in time to confront the immaculate politician.

"Mr. Haig," cried this person, beaming with the proper pleasure. "I am delighted."

He advanced smiling, suave, and, as ever, self-contained.

"Thank you," said John, as he shrunk from the hand and sank into the seat which Gwynne rather ceremoniously offered him. He felt coursing through his veins a novel sort of desperate courage, given its being by the very manner of the man, and he rushed, therefore, at once to the point. "I hope

you'll be as pleased at the end of this interview as you are now," he continued. "I've come, you see, on another delicate mission."

Gwynne raised a pair of politely puzzled eyebrows.

"Delicate missions," he ventured, "seem rather—if I may say so—in your line, Mr. Haig."

"Perhaps," John grimly admitted. "But this one's more than commonly important. I've got a lot to say, but I'll be just as brief as I can, and I beg that you'll try to be patient. On my part I won't take up a minute more of your time than I can help. I'm threatened, I've got to tell you, with a very serious charge, a charge that you can prevent, and that you, better than anybody else, ought to know I'm in no way guilty of. I want you to recollect all that you know of me. I want you to remember, in short, the time I visited you in your office and how I refused any of the—rewards, I believe you called them—which you offered me. And I want finally to ask you if you don't think that was

the act of an honest man put to a supreme test?"

Gwynne twirled his glasses about upon a wide black tape.

"My dear sir," he began, "there was never any question of——"

"Oh, Mr. Gwynne," broke in John, "let's dispense with all that! We're both men of the world and can talk to each other as such. If there wasn't then any question of my honesty, there's a mighty big one now that you'll be shortly called upon to answer. With one word you can answer it and quiet the whole matter."

"I have not," the politician assured him, "the remotest idea of what you're pleased to refer to."

John, regarding him sharply, was convinced.

"Very well," he granted with an effort. "Then I'll tell you. It's this: Last night your house was entered by a burglar, a man who is well known to the police and has at least once before served time for a somewhat similar offence. You shot him and hit. He

managed to get away and return to his lodgings. He thought he was unobserved, but he was mistaken, and he will undoubtedly be traced to his living-place. That place he shared with me. I won't tell you why, or what I thought of this man and still think of him. I only want you to say—what I'm sure you must be certain of—that I was in no way concerned in this or any other of the man's crimes."

Gwynne was listening with a surprise clearly unassumed. At the end he had but one awed comment to offer:

"Great Lord!" he gasped, "you don't mean to say you're going to give him up?"

John clinched his hands; his eyes flashed.

"Hardly!" he thundered, and then, as a look of frank relief overspread the features of the politician, he added: "I suppose I ought to tell you that I couldn't give him up even if I wanted to."

"Has he skipped?" asked Gwynne.

"He is dead," said John.

Gwynne's mouth opened to form a sudden question, and then stiffened. His eyes grew

wide in fright. He passed a hand across them and took a few nervous turns up and down the room. At the end of his walk he stopped short before John's chair, his hands clasped behind his back. His face was visibly softened.

"Mr. Haig," he began, "I don't mind telling you that you've gone up in my opinion several pegs. I generally know men, and when you sprang this story on me I really thought for a minute that you were here to peach. I can't tell you how relieved I am. I have to add only one thing: of course I know I was quite within my rights in shooting this fellow, but it's a big business, killing a man, and if you prove to be correct in saying that he's really dead, why, naturally, that ends the case. It would be preposterous to suppose that you were in any way concerned in it."

John had waited with head lowered and teeth set, ready for a fight. As he listened his antagonism fell from him, and, at the conclusion, he rose, fumbling in his pockets.

"Thank you, Mr. Gwynne," he said. "I

know what that means you'll do at the Front. There's no need of the case ever going past the coroner. I guess I pretty generally misunderstood you——"

"We've misunderstood each other," corrected Gwynne.

"Well, that's a pleasant way to put it. At any rate, I feel I've done you an injustice. There's now no use in concealing from you that I thought you'd throw me down on this if you could, and I'd come here to fight you. But you've been everything you should be, and I'm ready to hand over my ammunition." He drew out a letter and held it between his trembling fingers.—"We have buried the hatchet, I take it?" he added.

Gwynne spread out his hands.

"My dear sir!" he sufficiently exclaimed. Then, for greater lucidity: "It remains only for me to call up police headquarters and then to give this unfortunate man a quiet and decent burial."

"Then," said John, "here's your letter." And he prepared to leave.

"My letter?" asked Gwynne.

He took the note; recognised it with the mere flutter of an eyelid; made sure by a second glance of its authenticity; stowed it hurriedly away, and turned his quick eye upon his visitor.

"I don't want to keep you," he apologized, "and you mustn't feel that I consider I've any great title to ask you the question, but I should rather like to know how you came by this."

"No one else has seen it," John assured him. "It was sent me, in return for a favour, by the man you wrote it to, and I think I have a right to do with it as I choose."

"Hum. And so you give it to me?"

Haig nodded.

For another moment Gwynne regarded him in silence.

"Upon my soul," he ejaculated, "I don't know you yet! But I'm sure of one thing, you may be certain: whether you're devilish good or devilish deep, I'm more obliged to you than I care to say, and you're, in either case, one of the few kinds of men I admire

and need. May I ask one last favour of you, then?"

John assented.

"It's only to wait here for ten minutes. I'll be back, no doubt, in really less than that."

It was a good quarter-hour, however, before he reappeared, and to John the time seemed thrice that long. He was at first bewildered and then suspicious, but, just as he was making ready to fly, Gwynne was there once more, a visible confutation of his unjust doubts.

"I'm sorry to have kept you," he explained, "but there were one or two things that I had to arrange. Now, Mr. Haig, this time I'm not going to ask you your price, but I am going to repeat that you've won my admiration, and that you've honestly and honourably put me so far in your debt that anything I can do for you—anything at all—won't seem too much. No—don't speak. I must hurry away, but you must wait here a little and think it over. It's a bit sudden, I know. I want only to add that I now under-

stand thoroughly all"—he spoke with benevolent but significant emphasis—"all that you want, and, as I've said, I don't think you can ask anything that I'll consider I can't gladly do for you."

With a rush of blood to his face, with a tingle of the nerves in his finger-tips, Haig took the meaning. He gasped at what he thought the monstrosity of it, and, as he wondered open-mouthed, there returned to him the memory of that paragraph in the paper of the day before, and the silent misery that had followed the sight of it. Then the shock had dulled him, and later the subsequent tragedy had forbidden its intrusion into the foreground of his mental life. But now he took, as from afar, his whole view of the thing; slowly, painfully, but still from afar, for there was yet—he thanked Heaven—left him this grain of self-respect.

"No, Mr. Gwynne," he said, "no, thank you, there is nothing—nothing further which you can do for me."

But Gwynne had left the room.

XXIII

PROSPEROUS ART

And as Haig turned to hurry after the retreating politician Phyllis barred the way.

She stood between the curtains, a hand upon each, a pathetic, white-faced figure, which nevertheless looked him in the eyes with steadfast appeal.

John started back.

"I heard you," she explained in a low, monotonous voice.

"You heard me?" he repeated. "I—I beg your pardon. I had no idea—I assure you that I had no idea at all——"

"That I was eavesdropping? Well, I might not call it that—but I make no denials. You spoke rather loud— But no, I don't make denials, for, after all, what does it matter since, although I heard you, I am here?"

John's heart leaped as he regarded her. Love with something that was near kin to hate fought for the possession of him. All his pent-up desire contended with his new-born anger to drive him mad and to force a return to the primeval manhood.

"Then," he said brutally, "if you heard me, you understand how I regard this matter —you understand it better than I could tell you to your face, no doubt, for, there's no denying it, I'm still a coward."

As if to ward away the cruelty of his blow she put up a trembling little hand.

"Don't," she said feebly, and leaned against the door-post for support.

He was still unappeased.

"I have spoken," he returned, "the truth," and added, somewhat more generously, "I'm sorry it hurts you, but that's usually the way with truths. I can't conscientiously take back one word of it."

Phyllis spoke with a slight return of strength and spirit.

"I want you," she answered him, "I want you to listen to me. I'm not asking you for

your mercy. Don't suppose that I am. I am asking you only for justice——"

"That's one of the many things that are not to be had in this world," growled John.

She did not regard his reply.

"I know you've condemned me," she hurried on. "I know that you think I've done something wrong, something shameful, and I can almost admire you for standing so by your colours—but that gives me all the more hope and right to ask that you don't condemn me unheard."

John smiled grimly.

"And I?" he cried. "Who has ever granted me that right? Least of all have you!"

"You forget," she replied steadily. "That is just the point. You had a thousand chances and took none of them."

He brushed aside her argument with a gesture of impatience.

"Where's the use of talking any more about it?" he asked. "Can't you see that we'll never understand each other?"

"Perhaps," she granted him. "But at

all events I'm going to give you the opportunity to understand me. You may not care anything about me—I don't see how you could care and lie—but I'm not going to have you think that I'm guilty of—of what you think me guilty of."

"That's a woman forever," he replied. "They must eternally associate confidence with love. As a matter of fact, love has no more to do with confidence than it has to do with politics."

"Confidence is indispensable, at all events, to happy love."

"Happy love!" he retorted. "How could I know anything about that? From my experience I should say that love had about as much to do with happiness as it has with confidence."

"Just so much."

"Well, perhaps you know—now. What I am sure of is that it has nothing to do with truth. And I know that because, as you stand there now, I love you!"

"Then," she cried, "you can understand! Can't you see how it was? The first shock

to me really was that you had deceived me. I couldn't think that it was true till you confessed it yourself, but then the shock was that you had kept it all from me, while you were saying with the same breath that you loved me. It was more than wrong, too, it was foolish, for, as you see now, I might have saved you everything. But, above all, it was wrong, and that is what I first felt. Later you were away again. Nobody knew where you were, and I knew only that you'd gone away saying that you didn't care anything about me. When you could deceive me, I said, you couldn't love me. I only took you at your own word, and so I was the readier to accept the position of all the world. It's only what I've been brought up to. Can't you see what it means? I did come then to think that you were bad, and that I could never love you again."

She had taken a step forward towards him and was pleading with an ingenuous grace, enhanced not a little by the fact that as yet she was utterly unconscious that it was indeed love and not justice that she was

asking. She hesitated an instant and then pursued:

"I was wild with grief. I didn't go out to lots of places that I should have gone to, and I cried myself to sleep night after night. Then Marsden Payne told me that he loved me. I've known him ever since I was a little bit of a girl, and I was crazy with grief and pride. I think what I most wanted was to have people believe I didn't care, and so I—I took him."

John had been listening with the mixed feelings which had assumed possession of him upon this first new sight of her, but, as she proceeded, the pity that is the better part of love for women had gradually overcome the pride which is the larger portion of all anger. He was ready to surrender completely when she mentioned the name of Payne. At that he stiffened into rebuke.

"Well," he said conclusively, "you've taken him."

She looked into his unyielding eyes and, with a little stifled sob, flung herself upon his breast. Her pride, which had served her so

ill so long to deceive herself, could not last in his sight.

"John, John!" she cried. "Forgive me! Please, please forgive me! I wasn't going to tell you—ever—but I no sooner said 'Yes' to him than I knew it was only you—that it never, never, could be anybody else as long as the world lasts!"

She threw her arms about his neck, but Haig, although he shook with inward struggle, would not respond in kind. Above all his other emotions, and mastering them all, there came upon him, as if with her touch, the discovery that all the while he had never fundamentally retreated from his original position as a claimant of clearly established rights before the tribunal of the world. Through his every disappointment with its superficial effects, he had kept, deep in his heart, to his appeal for those rights. Even in his last weak visit to the bishop's he saw now a hatred for that frailty; even during his employment in the bank he had not gone, as he had to his own soul pretended, over to the enemy. No, the choice had not yet finally

been made; it was to be made this day forever, and it was Phyllis who was pressing upon him the issue.

Apart from the material difficulties, he reflected that to concede to her would be to concede all.

"You thought as every one else did," he repeated.

"Only for a little while, dear, only for a little while, though it did seem years to me."

He looked down at her and trembled. He even permitted himself momentarily to dally with the danger.

"Why, from your own point of view," he vainly remonstrated, "it's impossible! Your world knows the truth about me, and construes it accordingly. And you are of your world."

"No, no," she sought to assure him. "I know now that you only deceived me for what you thought was best. But I'm afraid I gave you a wrong impression about the others knowing. I meant only the bishop and Mrs. Osgood. They seemed a great many when I didn't know it at all."

"Then the others——"

"The bishop said you'd gone away on a long trip—and I said so, too. There's another thing I didn't mean to tell you! But you see, I'm telling you now."

In his heart John knew that he loved her, and he would rather a thousand times that she had not loved him than that, loving him, she should, instead of offering to fight beside him, proffer a bribe and tempt him to a treason.

But Phyllis, changed as he had changed her, was still too much of her own faith so much as to suspect these shades of distinction. For her it was enough if he would come to her and could come above the doubts of the world. She continued:

"Why, if papa takes you up—and he says he owes you all he can do—it's a mere paying of a debt, dear—no one can believe a word of the slander. It never got beyond mere suspicion, anyhow, and this would end it at once."

"Fealy——" began John.

"Oh!" she caught at his thought, "it

hasn't got any farther with the newspaper people or the bank. The newspaper people can easily be told that they were mistaken—that papa was, too; and as for the bank, Mr. Drake was to be here this morning early—he may be here now—to see papa on some especially private business, and could be told almost at once."

"But I would know what they thought."

"You'd know what they thought whatever you did; you knew it before, so far as the newspaper was concerned, and they'd think far less if you did as I ask, John. Don't you see that they can't say a word about it? Nobody will ever know—nobody. O Jack, Jack! I never thought that I'd come to ask a man to love me, but I want you to love me, I want you to!"

She raised her lips, but with a mighty effort he regained his control.

"What does that matter?" he asked.

She released herself and looked up at him in real awe.

"Matter?" she repeated.

"Yes, what does that count?"

She straightened herself instantly.

"Then," she said, "you want to tell me that you don't care anything about me?"

He looked at her longingly.

"I care for you," he replied, "more than I ever did before."

She gave a short, small cry of joy.

"But then why——" she hesitated.

"Because," he annoyedly explained, "haven't you just said that you'd engaged yourself to Payne?"

"Oh," she could laugh at it now, "what a goose you are! Don't you know that's a woman's privilege?"

Considering his former attitude towards her, he was marvellously righteous.

"It's nobody's privilege to break their word."

"But I don't love him!"

"You knew that when you told him that you did. Besides, he probably won't mind that."

"But you came first, Jack."

"Yes, but you had broken with me when he came along."

"Well, I'll break with him now. I'll write him at once—only too gladly."

"Yes, 'too gladly.' But you've passed your word, and you haven't been released."

"It's for the woman to do the releasing, please. And, anyhow, Jack— Oh, you don't understand these things!"

A sudden revulsion swept over him.

"No," he cried, "I don't! I don't understand it! You can't love me. No woman could love a man and think of him as you have thought of me. I don't believe that I can really love you, after all, because of the way I have had to think of you. We say we love each other now, but what does that signify? Only that we're carried away by the time and the circumstances. They can't last forever. And in the future what would the memory of all that's dead and gone be to us? More than a dead memory! No," he groaned, "it can't be! I wish to God it could, but it can't be!"

He made again for the door, but she would not have him go. Like every woman who has once flung away her pride, she could

not have recovered it had she so wished. She clung about his neck and plead with him, passionately, incoherently, but persistently.

He would not be moved, yet still she clung to him. He shook himself free, and her arms, as in that early vision of her in the street, slipped from his neck to his waist, to his knees, to his feet. And as he at last flung wide the door she had half-risen only for one parting word:

"Grant me," she said with outstretched arms, "one thing. You said we were moved by the circumstances of the moment. Don't —don't say Yes or No until to-night!"

He looked back at her, hesitated, rushed for her and devoured her in a great embrace. He felt that if he gave in to her it would be not because he wished to make his peace with the world, but because the world offered Phyllis as a prize, because the hook was baited with a woman. A woman once more; no longer the only one. He was kissing, he thought, his own frenzy, his own dream, bidding good-bye to his ideal of women, but feeding, at the same time, his primitive and

even stronger passion for this one woman in his arms.

Then, with her question still unanswered, he ran out of the room, out of the house, and made for home.

Home! Regardless of all danger—ready, indeed, to welcome any battle that was open, hard, physical—he almost slammed, but scorned now to lock, the quivering door. Yet, once inside, he paused and looked about the place with an involuntary shudder. A few square feet of rat-eaten floor; a dirty, draughty window; a miserable fireplace; low, black rafters, and a rough brick wall: this was his home. And that still form upon a disordered mattress—that was its only other tenant.

Here, then, he finally determined, was the turn of his fortunes at the last. This was more the cross-roads of his destiny than ever the day he left the jail. Whichever way he turned and with whatsoever of pleasure or bitterness, he was now sure that he made towards moral defeat. The battle was over and

lost. He went to the pallet by the window and looked long and searchingly at the unanswering features refined by the delicate fingers of death. He dropped the blanket and, sinking upon his own bed, tried hard to see his way—in vain. One only of two things remained now for him to do: to curse God and die as Newton had died, or to join again and forever the ranks of the world and receive forever the world's golden pay.

(1)

THE END

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